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THE

BISHOP OF HEREFORD'S

SERMONS.

1801.

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SELECT

SERMONS;

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

TWO CHARGES

TO

THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE.

BY

Butler
JOHN LORD BISHOP OF HEREFORD.

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TO

His Grace JOHN,

LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

MY LORD,

A Volume of this ſort, appearing before your Grace, late in the Author's life, without much Importunity from Friends, near the Expiration of all love of Fame, and other idle Paſſions, may ſtand in need of a reſpectable Patron, to preſerve it from immediate Oblivion.

I have indeed had the good fortune to be favoured by two Primates of our Church, and bleſs God for the ſurviving

ing exiſtence of one of them, probably to my laſt moments. I have endeavoured to derive benefit from their Example; have been convinced, by their aſſiduous Labours, of the Importance of their Station; and by their general Conduct, of the Powers they poſſeſſed.

Our gracious Sovereign was providentially deprived of one of theſe exemplary Prelates, about the time, when all Religion and Government in Europe began to be threatened with a terrible Convulſion. The menace has taken effect in a melancholy degree.

Yet, by the Wiſdom of our Sovereign; by his ſenſe of the great efforts, which Church and State might demand at a critical juncture, to preſerve

ſerve our excellent Conſtitution intire, in every part; the CARDINAL Virtue of PRUDENCE, which has, at all times, contributed much to the Government of the world, occurred to his Royal mind, and your Grace's Character accompanied it.

Hence our Church has been hitherto at Peace, in the midſt of Wars and Tumults abroad. Separatiſts from us have preſerved their reſpect to Law and Government, and Chriſtianity is apparently in a flouriſhing ſtate in theſe Iſlands, ſo far as that comfort may be extracted from the preſent view of Religion among us.

In confidence of all this, I humbly offer to your Grace, and to the Church,

in

in the Government of which I have, by divine permiſſion, been admitted to a ſhare, a ſmall poſthumous memorial of,

MY LORD,

Your Grace's moſt faithful,

Dutiful and obliged,

Humble Servant,

J. HEREFORD.

Hereford, May 25, 1801.

PREFACE.

TO

THE CHRISTIAN READER.

THE Author of this Publication, unwilling to invite an attentive Reader to it, without a ſufficient motive, regrets that he has no motive completely ſatisfactory to offer.

He is fully ſenſible of the Services done, by our great Predeceſſors in this Proteſtant Church, to Preachers and Hearers; and is truly diffident of himſelf, when he takes a retroſpect to them. Having not been particularly ſolicited by the Friends, who knew his age, to

hazard this appearance, nor prompted by preſſures of neceſſity, he has in fact not more to ſay for himſelf, than what is ſtrictly true, though it appears to himſelf not very intereſting.

He has for many years been occupied in this branch of Clerical duty, and having been permitted by Almighty GOD to ſurvive his capacity of paying due attention to it, he became weary at laſt of being totally uſeleſs. The motive was mortifying, and ſeemed merely perſonal; but he was conſoled by another, rather more intereſting to a CHRISTIAN Reader.

He had often reflected upon the benefit of hearing or reading Sermons. Both have been of eminent uſe, and are ſtill conſiderably ſo; nor does he apprehend the benefit to be conferred more by the Preacher, than acquired by the

the Hearer, or Reader. An ingenious, well-connected, or well-reaſoned Sermon, will make its way into an honeſt and good heart; but if the Hearer or Reader be not of that deſcription---if the Seed be not ſown in the ground, where it can thrive, the Preacher's labour will end in diſappointment. It is, therefore, of uſe to a Chriſtian mind, to be waylaid by ſuch maxims or axioms, as are ſuited to it, on all the occaſions, which variety of Sermons offers. The Public is eaſily entertained, but not ſo eaſily informed. The Heart and the Underſtanding muſt co-operate, in order to keep up the Faith and Repentance requiſite to Salvation.

Our bleſſed Lord delivered a Collection of Precepts, at the commencement of his Miniſtry, which, in their collective ſtate, are called a Sermon.

In that ſtate they were originally publiſhed---have had poſſeſſion of the world for near ſeventeen hundred years paſt, and ſtill retain their currency. They have made an impreſſion by the Extracts from them, in the way of Comment and Illuſtrations, which familiariſed them to the private Reader or Hearer. The Church, in compiling the Liturgy ſoon after the Reformation, aſſiſted this pious uſe of the Sermon on the Mount, by a Prayer, that theſe and other detached ſentences, which may be ſuppoſed to comprehend all Holy Scriptures, written for our learning, might be ſo read, marked, learned, and inwardly digeſted, that by patience, and comfort of GOD's holy Word, they might ſupport the bleſſed hope of everlaſting life.

Now, this great work was prepared within

within the compaſs of three chapters, from which private Chriſtians ſilently drew materials for a body of practical Divinity. Hence there is hardly a Sermon in our language, which may not have been, providentially, the inſtrument of converting a ſinner from the error of his ways, in a ſingle ſentence, imbibed by an honeſt Reader or Hearer. This was a power in language, to which it may be ſaid, He only was equal, who ſpoke as one having authority, or as never man ſpake. But it is poſſible for a perſon, under the influence of ſuch a Speaker, to communicate, though leſs perfectly, the good principles thus collected, for the benefit of his fellow Chriſtians. It is even poſſible for a man to review the former reflections of his own mind, and apply them to preſent

ſent uſe, as if they were recent, and ſo become a Monitor to himſelf.

We have an inſtance of this in the very learned Dr. Barrow, who having, at a certain time of his life, had juſt reaſons for ſome diſcontent, and feeling them, to the great diſquiet of his mind, had recourſe to his own excellent Sermons on Contentment, and was ſo converted, either by a ſingle ſentence, or a ſingle argument, that he was reſtored to Chriſtian Equanimity during the reſt of his life. This has been authentically told of him.

Authorities for this profitable uſe of Sermons, are not meant to be applied to theſe before us, which aim at no higher Apology, than that of humbly aſpiring to encourage better Chriſtians, and better Writers, to give vent to a ſucceſsful

ſucceſsful admonition to ſome duty, which may eaſily eſcape the memory.

There is at this time a comprehenſive one alive, which has a Right to the poſſeſſion of our memories, for many years to come---"GRATITUDE TO GOD"---a duty eaſily diſplaced from its hold on the heart of man, by the memorable cauſe of it, NATIONAL PROSPERITY for ſeven or eight years paſt.

Hereford, May 19, 1801.

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SERMON I.

I CORINTH. XIII. 13.

NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY, THESE THREE; BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY.

FAITH, HOPE, and CHARITY, appear in this paſſage, as in other of St. Paul's Epiſtles, abſtracted from their object. But as the object of FAITH is known to be GOD and his infinite perfections; JESUS CHRIST and his infinite merits; and the Holy Spirit, who deſcended to plant and propagate the Chriſtian Church, after our Lord's Aſcenſion; and, as the object of Chriſtian HOPE can be no leſs than the important bleſſings promiſed by God in Chriſt Jeſus; it ſeems evident, that the object of Charity, or of LOVE, which is the original word, muſt be

GOD, who, in his infinite love to us, ſent JESUS CHRIST to redeem us from the guilt and the puniſhment of ſin, and to bring us back to our Creator, in life and happineſs eternal.

It appears, then, upon this ſtate of the words of my text, to be the meaning of the Apoſtle, that to LOVE Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, is a higher degree of Chriſtian perfection, than the Faith and Hope required in a Chriſtian.

But, obvious as this meaning is, it has been underſtood, or pretended, that the Charity here ſo pre-eminent, is the mutual love and good-will we owe to one another; and this is confidently ſaid to be a higher principle of action, than Faith and Hope in God, or than the acquiſition of any Chriſtian accompliſhment, or gift. Humanity is conſidered as a more perfect way; it is extolled as the firſt of Chriſtian duties, as RELIGION itſelf.

It

It may, therefore, be of uſe to prevent the degradation of Religion from its proper place in the beſt human minds. We may do this by conſidering, which ſenſe of the word CHARITY was moſt probably here meant, the Love of God, or the Love of our fellow creature.

In the chapter before this, the Apoſtle inſtructs his Corinthian converts in the nature and uſe of the ſpiritual gifts diſpenſed to the Chriſtian church in its infancy. Theſe gifts being divers, an emulation aroſe among their teachers for the beſt, or for the preference of that kind, which each of them poſſeſſed. After ST. PAUL had dwelt upon this ſubject, he recommends to them ALL to "covet earneſtly the beſt gifts," and then adds theſe words, "yet I ſhew unto you a "more excellent way."

The more excellent way muſt have been ſomething preferable to "coveting earneſtly "the beſt gifts," ſomething which would

more ſucceſsfully carry on the work of ſupporting and extending the Chriſtian church, both at that time, and in ſubſequent ages, when theſe gifts ſhould ceaſe; and as it was "a more excellent way," that is, as it excelled the powers they then had, or pretended to have, or coveted; it muſt be ſomething which ſhould inveſt them completely with all the piety and virtue eſſential to the Chriſtian life.

Accordingly, the chapter before us, after having been ſo introduced by the laſt verſe of the preceding chapter, contains the Apoſtle's ſenſe of the merits and effects of the Charity he recommends.

He prefers it to the gift of tongues, in the moſt ſupernatural degree; to the gift of prophecy, or interpreting Holy Scripture; to the underſtanding of all myſteries and all knowledge; and even to that high degree of Faith, which, according to a proverbial deſcription of it, uſed by our Lord himſelf, was

was ſaid to be capable of removing mountains.

I am nothing, ſays our great Apoſtle, even if I were in the poſſeſſion of all theſe, without CHARITY. It profits me nothing, ſays he again, though I beſtow all my goods to feed the poor, a very ſignal exertion of human Charity; and though I give my body to be burnt, a moſt heroic effort of Faith and Hope; all this profits me nothing, if I have not CHARITY.

He then proceeds to diſplay the effects of Charity, in forming our minds for habits of Chriſtian virtue. It ſuffereth long and is kind; it envieth not; (what an excellence!) it leads to humility, for it vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up; to temperance and chaſtity, for it doth not behave itſelf unſeemly; it prevents arrogance, for it ſeeketh not even our own; it diſpoſeth man to reſign his whole ſoul to the word and will of God, for it is not provoked by injuries, nor diſ-

turbed by ſuſpicions; it feels no pleaſure in evil, but rejoiceth, as another Apoſtle did, to find Chriſtians walking in truth.

He next explains to the Corinthians, how permanent a principle Charity is. Their *ſpiritual gifts* were to fail; their *knowledge* was imperfect, and would certainly vaniſh; but CHARITY, having a perfect eternal object, would be eternally exerciſed.

Is it probable, that he meant ſo to exalt, above all that is called a duty from man to his Maker, One moral obligation, evidently ſubordinate to the claims upon us from our God; reſulting from them without doubt, but ſurely not greater in value and conſequence, than Faith and Hope in God? Could the Apoſtle, for inſtance, prefer relief to the poor, or forgiveneſs of enemies, the former at the expence of a ſordid, the latter of an odious paſſion, to FAITH and Hope in God, and Jeſus Chriſt our Lord? Or could he, who knew ſo well, that the great Being, upon

upon whom our exiſtence here, and our ſalvation hereafter, depend, is the ſupreme and ultimate object of the whole duty of man, raiſe a competition between our duty to Him and to one another, and give the preference to the latter?

Some of the excellencies attributed to Charity, are indeed applicable to the love we owe to one another. Our bleſſed Saviour, St. John and St. Paul, do juſtice to that principle. But they conſider it as ſubordinate to, implied in, and flowing from, that immenſe Fountain of Love; and they never explicitly ſtate it as diſtinct from, or preferable to, the affections of heart and mind devoted to God.

If the words had been rendered agreeably to the original, and as they ſtand in the beſt tranſlation, "Now abide FAITH, HOPE, and "LOVE," it would have been decided long ago by the general courſe of language and reaſoning, that the Apoſtle intended nothing leſs than the LOVE of GOD.

Let us hear our Saviour's ſenſe of the matter. "This," ſays he, "is the FIRST and "GREAT Commandment; thou ſhalt love "the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, "and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy "mind. The ſecond," he adds, "is like "unto it;" for it is love as well as the other; "thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf." But as the love of God is a preference of Him before all beings, the love of our neighbour muſt either be an inferior duty, or it becomes a preference of man to God; whereas the law to which our Lord refers, ſo far from intending this, preſcribes a meaſure to it—"Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as "THYSELF." The firſt and great Commandment is unlimited. It requires every power of the heart, and ſoul, and mind, to be exerted, in the love of God, without reſerve or limitation.

The firſt duty of man was a ſtedfaſt, unmoveable attachment to his Creator. In this

this conſiſted human happineſs. When man followed the impulſe of his own will, in neglect of the poſitive will of his Maker, he fell from a great eminence—from the favour of GOD. But the merciful Creator, whoſe diſpleaſure was terrible to a loſt wandering creature, formed that ſublime deſign of infinite goodneſs, the Redemption, in order to bring this firſt human inhabitant of the new world back, as far as poſſible, to his original deſtination.

The race of a venerable patriarch was afterwards ſelected, to preſerve among mankind the knowledge of the Creator, till in the fulneſs of time the Redeemer ſhould appear, and by manifeſting the glory of God, promote the LOVE of him, in proclaiming good-will from Heaven to penitent man.

Upon the ſtrength of this revelation to Abraham and his deſcendants, the love of God was tranſmitted by pious minds to the happy

happy period, when it became an inſtrument to animate the Jewiſh ritual.

The Royal Pſalmiſt, whoſe genius was formed by his piety, extracted the materials of his divine compoſitions from a deep ſenſe of the infinite goodneſs of God, which filled his penitent heart and ſoul. This is the ſource of thoſe effuſions of gratitude and love to Almighty God, which are to this day admirably adapted to the ſentiments and deſires of a devout Chriſtian.

" I will love thee, O Lord, my ſtrength. " I have loved the habitation of thy " houſe. I was glad, when they ſaid unto " me, we will go into thy houſe. O love " the Lord, all ye his ſaints. O taſte and " ſee, that the Lord is good. Thy loving " kindneſs is better than life itſelf. My " heart and my fleſh crieth out for the liv- " ing God."

The warmth of his heart, his imagination, and the emotion even of his bodily ſtrength,

ſtrength, which he calls his fleſh, were all alive, in following the fountain of vital and mental powers. They were active in deriving all holineſs and purity from the Holy One of Iſrael, the object of our love. "O "ye, that love the Lord, ſee that ye hate "the thing which is evil."

When the love of God reached its full maturity ~~in the heart and mind of man,~~ by the coming of Chriſt Jeſus into our world, HE, as I mentioned before, being perfectly acquainted with the power and extent of that love, quoted from the law, and adopted, the firſt and great Commandment, as a deciſive anſwer to the queſtion repeatedly made to him, What ſhall I do to inherit eternal life?

Such being the ſenſe of Patriarchs and Prophets, and of our Lord himſelf, it is clear, that St. Paul, who well underſtood what was meant to be perpetual in the Law of Moſes, and was beſides well read in the ſacred

ſacred books, which have provided for us a laſting ſupply of divine meditations of this ſort, had the ſalutary principle of the LOVE of God uppermoſt in his thoughts, when he was pointing out a more excellent way to perfection, than that for which the Corinthians were contending, ~~or a more perfect way to what he judged to be~~ moſt excellent.

It had been recommended by the law as the leading virtue of the human heart; but when St. Paul wrote this Epiſtle, it had been more ſenſibly impreſſed, by the end and deſign of the life and death of Chriſt. He brought an offer to the penitent ſinner, of more value than all the bounties of infinite goodneſs. He offered no leſs than deliverance from the dominion, the guilt, and the puniſhment of ſin; and added to this divine offer, life and happineſs eternal, on the condition of ſerious repentance. They know beſt how ineſtimable this offer is, who feel their

their ſinfulneſs, who look back at their paſt lives, and would, without a ſufficient Redeemer, have cauſe to apprehend extreme miſery from the diſpleaſure of Almighty God.

How would the pious Pſalmiſt have exulted, had he lived to ſee the fulneſs of time, the appointed period, when God ſent forth his Son to relieve the diſtreſſed penitent! The Chriſtian hath, for more than ſeventeen centuries paſt, had abundant matter to rejoice in God his Saviour, by contemplating, with a devout and grateful mind, the intereſt which we have in this adorable myſtery. It is intereſting enough to elevate us above all that is ſplendid or alluring in the preſent ſtate. Many things temporal are ſo. But their duration, with reſpect to each individual, is as ſhort lived as the eyes with which he beholds them. The Author of our Salvation was not limited by time in the diſpenſation of his bleſſing. After

ter having died to ſecure the perpetuity of it, he re-aſcended to the ſeat of bliſs, in order to mediate and intercede for penitent ſinners, leaving his Holy Spirit to conduct them through this perilous world, in the way that leadeth infallibly to life.

Under this meditation it is barely poſſible to commit a wilful ſin; or not to love the Lord our God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, who firſt loved us; or not to prefer him to any other object, particularly to the temptations that are continually at work, in exciting our paſſions, gratifying our perverſe appetites, and labouring to ſeparate man from God.

It is not enthuſiaſm, or the effect of a heated imagination, that can aſſume this ſober, rational preference of the Fountain of all Good. The love of God is a direction of the human mind to its moſt natural object. Charity to our fellow creature muſt be the produce of Charity towards God, which

which will impel us to conſult their wants, ſpiritual and temporal, for his ſake who is the Fountain of Univerſal Good.

Our bleſſed Maſter explains this, in anſwering the hypocrites, who aſked him, whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. His anſwer amounted to this, that it is lawful to do good at all times; the ſervice of God did not interfere with it, ſince doing good to man is itſelf an act of duty to God.

Away then with all thoſe extravagancies, which erect Humanity into ſomething diſtinct from Religion. It is not a principle independent of the love of God; it rather flows from that pious affection, or is lifted up into a co-operation with it.

We have ſome noble leſſons of humanity before the light of the Goſpel ſhone upon the moral world. The ſon of Sirach, a Jewiſh Helleniſtical Philoſopher, who ſtudied and wrote ſome centuries before the appearance

pearance of our Lord, thus diſcountenances the natural reſentments of anger againſt an injurious man, or a thoughtleſs defamer. "Admoniſh a friend; it may be he hath "not done it; and if he have done it, that "he do it no more. Admoniſh thy friend, "it may be he hath not ſaid it, and if he "have, that he ſpeak it not again. Admo-"niſh a friend, for many times it is a ſlan-"der, and believe not every tale. There "is one, that ſlippeth in his ſpeech, but "not from his heart; and who is he that "hath not offended. Admoniſh thy neigh-"bour, before thou threaten him; and not "being angry, give place to the law of the "moſt high."*

So ſpake the man, whoſe heart was full of humanity, and his precepts are the amiable, candid effuſions of a good mind. It would well become us all to graft them inwardly in our hearts. But Chriſtianity fa-

* Ecclus. xix.

cilitates

cilitates our progreſs in the practice of this noble duty, by the Apoſtolical maxim, that Charity is the firſt of all virtues, above Chriſtian Faith and Hope, and formed by its nature and object to be eternally permanent.

The Chriſtian who ſincerely loves his Creator and Redeemer, will paſs with innocence and purity through the preſent life, become qualified for the ſociety of the bleſſed, and finally, being delivered from the unavoidable evils which interrupt our meditations here, enter upon that perfect freedom of heart and mind, in which he will ſee what he now believes—enjoy what he now hopes—and, above all, have an eternity before him for the exerciſe of the moſt happy affection of the heart, directed to INFINITE GOODNESS.

SERMON II.

HEBREWS IV. 13.

ALL THINGS ARE NAKED AND OPENED UNTO THE EYES OF HIM, WITH WHOM WE HAVE TO DO.

THE Preſence of God in every part of the univerſe, is ſuggeſted by the underſtanding of every rational creature. It is more eaſily apprehended, than any doctrine, or any chain of reaſoning, drawn out at full length to explain it. The notion of a ſupreme and perfect Governor of the World, implies it; and that notion is as natural to man, as any the moſt obvious truth that enters his mind. The formal worſhip, in every known part of the world, of

of an invifible cauſe of all things, ſuppoſes his preſence and attention; and the duties of natural as well as revealed religion, ſuppoſe God to be a witneſs of all we ſay, think, and do.

This being, then, a truth as univerſally admitted as the belief of a God, we may proceed immediately from our text to the practical uſe of it. We are invited by an important conſideration, that a ſenſe of the Divine Preſence will go farther towards forming a religious and virtuous character, than any ſyſtem of doctrines or precepts—than the wiſeſt laws, or the moſt illuſtrious example; and whenever a ſenſe of God's Preſence poſſeſſes the human mind, it forms the good character at once, without laborious inquiries, or deductions of one truth from another. Suppoſe a Being of perfect holineſs and infinite power to be about our paths, and about our bed, and to ſpy out all our ways; ſuppoſe this, and we are im-

mediately impelled to do what he approves, and deterred, not only from the actual commiſſion, but from the very thought, of any act which would incur his diſpleaſure.

The impiety and immorality of every ſort, which good men lament, would be unknown, if all men conſidered themſelves as acting in the preſence of God. Inconſiſtent as the human character appears in many inſtances to be, it ſeems not capable—I muſt repeat it—of ſo unnatural an inconſiſtency, as that of committing wilful guilt, at the time of recollecting ſeriouſly, that the Governor and Judge of the World ſees it.

Yet it is certain, that much wrong is done, even by perſons, who believe God to be preſent to all they do. The general pravity of our nature is an inſufficient excuſe for this, becauſe that doth not act upon us by neceſſity; for it is well known, that we can check, and for a time ſubdue, the pravity

pravity of our nature, in the preſence of perſons from whom we deſire to conceal it. Few vicious men are ſo abandoned, as to expoſe their vices to the virtuous. Men of ſtrong paſſions appear, in the preſence of their ſuperiors, as calm and placid as either religion or philoſophy would have them to be: ſo that we have a temporary power, at leaſt, over ourſelves; and therefore might be as perfect as poſſible throughout our lives, with the ſame motives always about us, which make us aſſume perfection for a time.

Whence, then, this inſenſibility of God's Preſence, which occaſions even the believers in him ſometimes to live without him in the world, and, with a good principle in their hearts, to loſe ſight of ſo excellent a guide to its operation.

One plain account of the matter is, that many, even religious men, have not a right conception of this truth, which all men ad-

mit. Some paſſages of Scripture, which relate or ſignify the manifeſtation of God's glory in heaven, and in certain places, and on certain occaſions, in our part of the univerſe, have been ſo underſtood, as if this great eſſential perfection of the Divine nature were diviſible into degrees—as if God were more preſent at one time or place than another. This being favourable to thoſe evil inclinations, which are always ſtriving to bias even well-diſpoſed minds; and it being common, for perſons under undue influence, to change terms, and even ideas, almoſt inſenſibly, till they anſwer the wrong purpoſe—men who are once perſuaded, that God is leſs preſent to them at one time than another, will ſoon bring themſelves to act as if he were abſent, when they are not engaged in a direct addreſs to him.

The Scripture has guarded, in the cleareſt terms, againſt an abſurdity ſo pernicious to morals, even in the Jewiſh Church, where the

the ſpecial preſence of God in the Tabernacle, and afterward in the Temple, was an eſſential article of Religion. "Can any "hide himſelf in ſecret places, that I ſhall "not ſee him," ſaith the Lord by a Prophet; "do not I fill heaven and earth?" King Solomon aſſerts the immenſity and omnipreſence of God, in his prayer at the dedication of the very Temple, in which the Divine glory was to be diſplayed. "Behold, the heaven, and heaven of hea-"vens, cannot contain thee; how much "leſs this houſe, that I have builded." Our bleſſed Saviour tells the Samaritan woman, who was fully poſſeſſed that it was more material to worſhip God in one of the two rival temples, than in the other; that neither of them was the ſeat of God's preſence more than the reſt of the world; for that the true worſhippers ſhould worſhip the Father, any where, in ſpirit and in truth. So that whatever is ſaid in Scripture,

of the manifeſtation of the Divine glory at particular times and places, gives us no authority to ſuppoſe, that God ceaſes to be preſent to us when we ceaſe to worſhip him. He is undoubtedly far from the wicked in one ſenſe; the light of his countenance is withdrawn from them; but they are dreadfully miſtaken, if they flatter themſelves, that their actions are out of his ſight.

The miſtake is extremely dangerous, becauſe we fall into it inadvertently; and it may get laſting poſſeſſion of the mind which has fallen into it. Every thing ſeems abſent to us, to which we are not preſent; and this we inſenſibly apply to God, whom we cannot conceive ever to be abſent. We pray to him perhaps earneſtly and devoutly; and when that duty is diſcharged, we go into the world, as if we were going from God, and enter upon buſineſs or pleaſure, without the reſtraints which the notion of his

his preſence laid upon us, when we were worſhipping him.

This unhappy inattention, is the moſt obvious account of the inconſiſtency of a ſinner's conduct, who believes in God. It is an unhappy inattention, if we conſider, that great part of the wickedneſs committed in the world, the wantonneſs with which we are apt to enjoy the bleſſings of heaven, the deſperate acts into which men plunge in diſtreſs, the evils ariſing from pride, anger, envy and other odious paſſions, which make us miſerable and diſgrace us, may be traced up to this thoughtleſſneſs of the Preſence of God. All theſe evils would, not hide themſelves, but fly from his preſence, the moment we turn our minds or lift up our hearts to him; and we cannot continue the conſideration of this important truth beyond that moment, without obſerving much to condemn and reform within us.

It

It has been ſometimes obſerved by ſevere moraliſts, how odious men would be to one another, if their hearts were as viſible as their countenances; and this has been advanced, to ſhew the neceſſity of ſome ſort of diſſimulation. A ſatyrical concluſion from a melancholy truth! It implies an obſervation more worthy of our private thoughts, that ſuch hearts, as would render us odious to one another, many of us expoſe to God, before whom we cannot diſſemble.

Indeed, the Divine Preſence is ſo important a truth, that no time of our lives, neither youth nor vigour of health, no ſtation we fill, no independency we can pretend to, will make it ſafe or prudent to ſhut our minds againſt the eye of God. It is the ſtrongeſt guard to virtue. No temptation, no promiſes or threats, can ſeduce a mind deeply ſenſible of God's Preſence; for all the powers of the world united cannot promiſe

miſe or threaten ſo much, or perform their promiſes or threats ſo effectually, as the ſupreme Diſpoſer of Happineſs and Miſery.

Human laws might prevent many inſtances of iniquity, if they were not evaſible. Reputation in ſome degree ſupplies that defect, and will lead men to act as they ſhould, in caſes to which the letter of human laws doth not extend. But reputation loſes its force, when we are out of the ſight of men. They cannot ſee our hearts, nor follow us into the dark retirements of guilt. How feeble would be the reſiſtance of virtue to temptation, if this were all! God hath not left us without a ſtronger guard to virtue, than either the laws or the opinions of men. He is a witneſs to the moſt ſecret guilt, whether it be conceived in the heart, or executed under the cover of ſpecious pretences, or in the moſt remote concealments, that ingenious wickedneſs can deviſe.

The

The wife ſon of Sirach looks down with contempt upon the ſelf-deceit of the private ſinner. He repreſents him comforting himſelf, in the language of folly, guilt and cowardice united—"I am compaſſed about with "darkneſs; the walls cover me, and no-"body ſeeth me; what need I to fear?" In the next verſe he anſwers him; "Such "a man only feareth the eyes of men, and "knoweth not, that the eyes of the Lord "are ten thouſand times brighter than the "ſun, beholding all the ways of men." He applies this to one ſpecies of ſinners. It is applicable to many others. Where is the ſecurity of the diſſembler, the underminer, the private ſlanderer, the conſpirator, or any of thoſe peſtilential men, who walk in darkneſs? They are carrying on their deſigns in the preſence of God, and, at the ſame time forgetting the reſt of his attributes, they ſink into the natural or judicial con-

conſequences of guilt, when it is too late to ſee or to fear him.

So powerful a diſſuaſive from evil, is the Divine Preſence. It operates no leſs powerfully in aſſiſting and encouraging us in a courſe of piety and virtue. The moſt rational piety muſt meet with diſcouragements in the world. Impious men will miſrepreſent it, as all parties do the principles againſt which they combat. Their pride will not ſuffer them to ſee either their own dependent condition, or the power and goodneſs of their Maker. A ſenſe of God's Preſence will always confute the falſe reaſoning, and baffle the ridicule, of proud and impious men. Whilſt we conſider him as preſent to our thoughts, we ſhall not permit them to wander from the truth, eſpecially from that important truth, our relation to him, which alone will produce the ſeveral good diſpoſitions of mind that recommend us to God and ourſelves.

A mind

A mind thus poſſeſſed with the fundamental principle of all practical religion, will be leſs ſuſceptible of the impreſſions which pervert other minds. Whatever excites ambition, or avarice, or envy, or revenge, will become a trifle in proportion to the approaches we have made to the Creator and Governor of the Univerſe; and they will be as nothing, if we can arrive at the power of keeping his preſence in our thoughts.

The innocent pleaſures of converſation, and the neceſſary buſineſs and amuſements of human life, are conſiſtent with this ſtate of mind. It requires not a different world from that in which we live; nor is it viſionary to ſay, that men ought to recollect before whom they ſpeak and act, and that they who do, will be pure and innocent in their converſation, and fair and ingenuous in all their tranſactions with the world.

The

The powers of eminent underſtanding, which have in many inſtances proved dangerous to mankind, would, if rightly applied, be as beneficial to the world, as they are ornamental to the perſons who poſſeſs them; and we may judge how to give them a right direction, if we conſider, that men of the greateſt parts would not deceive or meditate miſchief before God. It would be a want of preſence of mind, and, ſo far at leaſt, a defect in underſtanding.

Apply the ſame principle to the inquirer after religious truth, and the effect will be immediate and ſtriking. In the preſence of God, men will lay aſide their prejudices, and raiſe their minds above ſiniſter views; they will ſearch after truth with the ſame temper, with which they would wiſh Him to bleſs them with the revelation of it; and being ſo diſpoſed, they will apply the Scripture to the only purpoſe, for which it

was

was tranſmitted to us, the improvement of our nature in its progreſs to perfection.

The laſt happy effect I ſhall mention, of the ſenſe of God's Preſence, is the comfort we derive from it, when either real or imaginary evils affect us; when the mind is dejected or caſt down, and feels the abſence of other ſupports. "I will lift up mine "eyes to Him, from whom cometh my "help," was a reſolution as rational, as it is pious. He is preſent—That alone is comfort, and lifts us up to that happy ſtate of mind, that duty and bleſſing of the Chriſtian Religion, RESIGNATION to the will of God.

It is, upon the whole, a moſt extenſive principle. It grounds and forms the Chriſtian character, reſiſts temptation, deters from ſin, invites and encourages piety and virtue, and reconciles us to affliction. The conſequence is, that we cannot too ſoon, or

too

too deeply, impreſs a ſenſe of God's Preſence upon our hearts.

When we have an opportunity of doing good, or are provoked to do miſchief, to a fellow creature, bleſſed is the man to whom a ſenſe of Divine Preſence occurs in that moment. When we are looking out for means of happineſs, we find them in recollecting, that the Fountain of all Happineſs favours them, if directed by his will.

When we lay before Him the ſorrows of a troubled mind, he knows our miſery better than we; He knows the duration, the extent, and the benefit of it; and we know enough of him to ſatisfy us, that we ſhall be either immediately or ultimately relieved.

When we are conſtitutionally diſpirited, not knowing what we feel, nor why we complain, the light of God's countenance will, by its appearance, diſpel the gloom, and lift up the dejected mind.

When the remembrance of guilt imbitters the night-thoughts of the ſinner, the promiſes of a merciful God, attentive to the anguiſh of his ſoul, will relieve him with the known pardon to all ſincere penitents.

When a good mind is diſturbed by the dreams of a religious ſcruple, the infallible remedy is, a recollection of the Preſence of Him, whoſe truth, revealed in his holy word, will rectify errors both wilful and innocent.

On the bed of ſickneſs, God himſelf will be the SAFEST refuge of the expiring patient; for we have no right to decide againſt ANY prayers then offered up. Happy the man, who has one, acceptable for himſelf.

It is, therefore, of the utmoſt conſequence that we acquaint ourſelves early with our omnipreſent and omnipotent Benefactor; that we never lay the thought of him wholly aſide, even in buſineſs or amuſements.

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They who make the experiment, will find time, even in that ſtate of mind, to think upon God; which is our bounden duty, as often as poſſible.

Conſidering how we are formed, how dependent and feeble we are, God be praiſed, that we have to do with Him, in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

SERMON III.

PSALM CXVIII. 8.

IT IS BETTER TO TRUST IN THE LORD, THAN TO PUT ANY CONFIDENCE IN MAN.

THE helpleſs condition of man throughout his life, his dependent ſituation, more or leſs, whether he be originally illuſtrious or obſcure, rich or poor, ſtrong or feeble, learned or ignorant, is generally known, and more known, than conſidered.

He muſt repoſe truſt ſomewhere in his infancy, in his tranſactions with other men, in his whole life and converſation, and in his laſt will and teſtament, if he has family, or property, or friends; or in the abſolute neceſſity of removing him from the ſight of the world,

world, when neither he can continue, nor his fellow creatures tolerate him, in it; this is matter of daily obſervation.

So that man, being himſelf an object of truſt, cannot juſtly be blamed for treating other men as ſuch. But for the DEGREE of confidence, which he places in any man or thing, he may be blamed—he often condemns himſelf, and is ſometimes reproached by perſons, who either are, or affect to be wiſer than he.

This is one remarkable inſtance among many, of the correctneſs of Scripture language. It is not repreſented in the text, as matter of cenſure, that we place any confidence in man, for our condition makes it neceſſary; it is only mentioned occaſionally, in recommending a higher object of human confidence.

Man is one of the principal objects, which uſurp the place of God in our minds. The benefit of truſting in man is ſuppoſed to be

great, and we often experience as much. But ſtill there are reaſons for heſitating before we decide, that man is a PERFECT object of truſt, that we are quite ſecure in reſting upon him.

This the Pſalmiſt appears to have conſidered, and to have ſatisfied his mind, that it is better to truſt in the Lord. He appears to have conſidered it well; for as he muſt have obſerved, that men's minds are much more habituated to truſt in one another, than to place any confidence in God, he has recourſe to that truſt which is uſually placed in man, for an idea of that which ought to be placed in God.

To truſt in man, is to diſencumber ourſelves of cares, fears, or anxieties, by reſting upon the truth, fidelity, and power of another. We are diſpoſed to truſt in the man, of whoſe veracity we are perſuaded, that is, to ſpare ourſelves the trouble of an inquiry into the grounds of any intereſting

aſſertion

aſſertion of his. This facilitates the intercourſe of human life, and would, if it were general, in ſome meaſure, anticipate the happineſs of a purer ſtate, where the motives and temptation, and of courſe the inclination, to deceit, will ceaſe to operate.

A ſtate of doubt is a mental diſeaſe. When the ſubject is of conſequence, we hardly know how to think or act; we become unſtable in all our ways; we cannot depend upon the iſſue with that degree of moral certainty, which is neceſſary to our proceeding with reſolution and vigour. The moſt determined characters may, in ſuch a caſe, feel the diſagreeable ſenſations of weak, irreſolute men.

Writers, who form the imaginary plan of a perfect and happy community, make a ſtrict regard to truth, one of the fundamental requiſites; becauſe every inſtance of deceit, if it were productive of no other miſery, would be the cauſe of a ſuſpicion and diſtruſt,

inconſiſtent with friendſhip, detrimental to commerce, and ſo the bane of ſociety.

But if an opinion of the veracity of another be ſuch an eaſe to the mind, that we may ſecurely conclude and act upon his declaration, how great an acceſſion to this happineſs is a perſuaſion of his friendſhip and power! To be faithful is, to be true and juſt in a more exalted degree. It is juſtice actuated and enlivened by affection. As truſt is oppoſed to doubt, when veracity is the object of it, ſo it is oppoſed to fear, when fidelity and power are its objects. Now fear is, perhaps, the uneaſieſt ſtate to which human underſtanding is expoſed. It betrays us into infirmities, which, when the evil befals us, it is diſgraceful to recollect, becauſe the apprehenſion of an evil is generally greater than the evil itſelf. To have a friend to whom to communicate our fears, and whoſe fidelity and power are competent

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to remove them, is one of the ways of recovering tranquillity, and providing for our ſecurity in the midſt of danger.

The happineſs of this, is ſomething more than negative. It is not mere abſence of fear; for it is enjoyment of ſafety, heightened by the pleaſures of mutual affection, and even by the approach, and ſometimes by the aſpect, of evil. When a great poet repreſents it as pleaſant to ſit ſecurely on the ſhore, in ſight of a diſtreſs at ſea, he diſtinguiſhes this pleaſure from a malignant enjoyment of other men's misfortunes, and appears to mean no more, than that there may be a pure and innocent pleaſure in the ſight of danger.

If this be true, when the ſecurity is natural or accidental, much more may be ſaid for the happineſs reſulting from the protection of a faithful friend. The comforts of ſelf love are then improved by ſentiments of gratitude. It is a joyful and pleaſant thing to be thankful. The contemplation of goodneſs

neſs in general is delightful; but goodneſs directed to an individual is a great improvement of that ſenſation, as it excites a partial benevolence, the exerciſe of which is the luxury of a ſocial creature.

To put a confidence in man, then, is to diveſt ourſelves of fears and doubts, upon the knowledge of his truth, fidelity, and power. If the confidence be rightly placed, it will ſucceed, in proportion to the certainty of other human proſpects or projects. But the experienced monarch, who inſtructs us in the text, declares it "better to truſt in "the Lord, than to put any confidence in "man." He had certainly experienced it, and we might take his word for it, even though he had not been divinely inſpired. Nor need we prove it, by reproaching human nature with the guilt, imputable only to particular men, of violating the confidence repoſed in them.

The maxim of my text, is rather founded in

in the impotence, than the perfidy of mankind. Men can but ſeldom anſwer all our expectations; they are ſubject to fears and doubts themſelves; their knowledge and foreſight are bounded, as well as their power; the very ſuccour they grant, may prove our deſtruction; they may beſides have good reaſons for a ſeeming neglect; their attention may be engaged by other objects, to which they are equally or more attached; every circumſtance, moreover, of our fears and diſtreſſes is not expreſſible—hence it is difficult to create an intire ſympathy; not to mention the many accidents, to which our condition is expoſed; diſtance of time or place; changes of fortune and temper; age and infirmities; which may conſiderably affect and diminiſh the fidelity or the power of the beſt friend we have; and if none of theſe ſhould diſappoint our confidence, yet his life is precarious, and all our

hope

hope and truſt may be unexpectedly blaſted in a moment.

Theſe imperfections are incident to all men. As the wiſe and the virtuous are not ſecure from ſome, ſo the moſt powerful are not exempted from the reſt. The Pſalmiſt knew this, when in general terms he gave the preference to a truſt in God; and to ſhew, that he meant the natural as well as moral imperfections of man, the next verſe carries his obſervation farther—" It is bet-" ter to truſt in the Lord, than to put any " confidence in PRINCES." Even they, who have all the power, which the ſtrength and wealth of a whole community commits to their hands, are not the moſt perfect objects of ſuch a truſt, as the moſt extenſive human power ſeems to appropriate to them, even if their power were equal, in its influence, to the moſt predominant deſigns of other men—for they are men, and as ſuch, ſubject

ſubject to the contingencies and imbecilities of human nature.

Now we cannot, conſiſtently with the belief in God, ſuppoſe any of theſe defects in him; and the hiſtory of his Providence in the Scriptures, amply ſhews, that he labours under none of them. Let us therefore conſider God as the moſt proper object of our truſt.

He is powerful, he is wiſe, and he is good; and each of theſe attributes is infinite. We cannot form an adequate idea of them, for they are not bounded. All we know of them is, that nothing is impoſſible to his power; nothing eſcapes his knowledge and wiſdom; and even the wickedneſs of man cannot interrupt his goodneſs. He is the ſame yeſterday, and to-day, and for ever.

Firſt, it is better to truſt in Him, than in man, becauſe he has all POWER. Indeed, a very ſmall ſhare of infinite power is requiſite

ſite to anſwer all the purpoſes of our confidence in him. Even if the power of God extended no farther, than the creation and government of the world we ſee, and its inhabitants; even with this boundary to his power, which we have no right to imagine, he has prodigiouſly more than will ſatisfy the wiſhes and hopes of every individual of his human creatures. But he is the Lord and ſole proprietor of the univerſe, upon which his will acts more freely than ours does upon our bodies. Conſidering the infinity of his power, it is far from a poetical exaggeration, when we read, "He ſpake the "word, and they were created." He has nothing to fear, for all nature is ſubject to him. What we call the ordinary courſe of nature, is a ſtanding miracle, if we compare the power neceſſary to ſupport it with the moſt outſtretched human power, not only of individuals, but of whole communities, or of all mankind united. If it be

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an eſſential quality in the perſon, in whom we confide, that he is able to anſwer the ends of our truſt, it is an extreme of folly to place it in man, preferably to God, upon whoſe power we wholly depend for our being, property, and whatever we make the ſubject of our happineſs.

We talk of the Laws of Nature, till we forget the meaning of the words, as if they were laws independent of Him, who created all that we call Nature. The laws of nature are only the regular execution of the Divine Will in the courſe of the natural world. The cauſe can produce no effect without the direction, immediate or remote, of Him, who is the firſt cauſe. The laws of nature are no laws to him. They are only laws enacted by him, which he can alter when it is his pleaſure to protect and defend any of his creatures, to prevent evil, or to make it productive of good.

Hence our Pſalmiſt, who was himſelf inveſt-

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ed with extenſive power, had the command of great armies. and a populous kingdom ſubject to his will, inſtead of truſting in a ſtrength ſo flattering, exulted only in this,—"the Lord "is on my ſide, I will not fear what man can "do unto me; though an hoſt of men were "laid againſt me, yet ſhall not my heart "be afraid; and though there roſe up war "againſt me, yet will I put my truſt in "Him." Human ſtrength is frail; kingdoms are expoſed to revolutions; armies to defeats; riches make themſelves wings; friendſhips, if they are not unfaithful, are impotent and mortal; God is a protector, whom neither time, nor chance, nor any exertion of his own power, can in the leaſt degree weaken; therefore, it is better to truſt in Him, than to put any confidence in man.

In the next place, He is infinitely WISE, whether by wiſdom we mean knowledge, or the application of it. To ſuppoſe any thing

thing hid from him, is to deny his Divine Perfections. He, to whom all things paſt, preſent, and future, are known, cannot be miſled by appearances, nor ſurpriſed, nor diſappointed. Hence, whatever he deſigns, it muſt be wiſe, and he moſt certainly brings it to paſs by the choiceſt means; and whatever is hard to be underſtood, in the courſe of his Providence, may be ſafely concluded to be the direct, though inviſible, means to ſome wiſe end.

Every ſeeming contingency is connected with a vaſt number of preceding and ſubſequent events; and it is, therefore, placed in the order in which it ſtands, becauſe He, who inhabiteth Eternity, ſees at one view, both the end and the various means that produce it. The mind of man would be ſoon loſt, in meditating on the depth of Divine Perfections, had not God himſelf fixed ſome bounds to meditations of that ſort, by directing us to the practical uſe of them.

Then it is, that in return for our "drawing "nigh to God, he draweth nigh to us," by taking us off from curious inquiries into the conſiſtency of fore-knowledge with contingency, of predeſtination with free will. Whatever becomes of thoſe difficulties, we know, that God is infinitely wiſe; and one undeniable conſequence for man to draw from it is, that He is to be truſted in, preferably to man. Every circumſtance of our fears and our condition is perfectly known to Him; he knows how to relieve us, and he knows from his clear perception of all futurity, whether any relief may be beneficial to us, or whether it may not interfere with ſome greater comfort deſigned for us by his good Providence, which the wiſeſt and beſt men cannot foreſee.

Beſides knowing our wiſhes and wants, He foreſees every danger that beſets us from without. His eyes are open upon all the ways of the ſons of men; he obſerves a deſign

ſign againſt our peace and ſafety, before it is ripe for execution, being a witneſs to the firſt imagination of it. He knoweth whereof we are made, therefore knows how much proſperity, and how much affliction, we can bear. Men cannot always gratify our wiſhes; very few are competent judges, in a certain degree, how far it is expedient to gratify them. Our Creator not only can make us happy, but he knows what will; what ſort of enjoyment is beſt ſuited to our faculties; in what inſtances our wiſhes are the impulſe of mere paſſion, and when they are the ſober reſult of reaſon duly exerciſed. All nature, and the whole hiſtory of the world, bear teſtimony to the wiſdom of God; whereas the lives and characters of the moſt eminent men betray ſomething imperfect; had they been ever ſo judicious in acting to the beſt of their knowledge, yet that knowledge could not, in any inſtance, admit the moſt diſtant compariſon with Divine Omniſcience.

In this reſpect, therefore, it is infinitely better to truſt in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.

In the third place, God is infinitely GOOD. Having none of the paſſions, which hinder the exerciſe of goodneſs in man, the Divine goodneſs operates as freely as Divine power. The men, in whoſe goodneſs we truſt, may have ſome latent envy, or malice, or avarice, or ambition, to move them to diſappoint the confidence we repoſe in them. They may withdraw their friendſhip or protection at a critical time, under pretences of prudence, or through motives of intereſt. But it would be both abſurd and impious to conceive ſuch a mixture in the operations of Infinite Goodneſs; which cannot ever be expoſed to the temptations or motives, that beſet and continually miſlead human minds.

But if we knew, what Infinite Goodneſs is, we ſhould feel much ſtronger motives, to have, in all exigencies, recourſe to it. We know

know it only from the effects which occur to us, in obſerving the world, or attending to what paſſes within ourſelves,—both of them funds for perpetual inſtruction. But the Chriſtian religion exhibits to us an inſtance ſo amazingly great, that we ſhould there ſee abundant reaſon to conclude the goodneſs of God to be infinite, if it were poſſible to conceive bounds to any of his perfections.

His mercy is over all his works; but to the intelligent part of his creatures, made after his own image, it muſt be particularly his glory to communicate happineſs. We may therefore caſt all our cares upon him, for he careth for us. Men, as we obſerved before, have wants or deſigns of their own; and are more frequently able than willing to anſwer our expectations. But God is always our preſent help in trouble, attentive to our wants, and omnipotent to relieve them. His patience and long-ſuffering are

only other words, to ſignify the uniformity of his goodneſs, whilſt his ungrateful creatures are inattentively employed in counteracting it. I conclude, then, upon this, as upon one more undeniable argument, that it is better to truſt in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.

It is a truth too evident to be ever diſputed; but clear and undeniable as it is, perſons in diſtreſs are too apt to miſtake their beſt friend. It is certainly carrying the caution too far, if men were to be adviſed, when entering upon a religious life, to withdraw all confidence from mankind; for, without ſome degree of it, how could we ſubſiſt in ſociety, or enjoy any of the lawful happineſs of life? Nor is it difficult to diſcern the caſes, in which we may ſafely confide in one another, if we would only have the patience to form a true eſtimate of their virtues and abilities, which would illuſtrate the maxim before us—that as but

a ſmall

a ſmall ſhare of our real happineſs depends upon other men, we ſhould very ſeldom truſt in them for the WHOLE of it, there being irreſiſtible reaſons to prove, that it is better to truſt in the Lord.

It deſerves, therefore, to be recommended upon a ſubject of ſuch conſequence, that we do not too precipitately form our judgment of happineſs, or of the men whom we expect to confer it. Friendſhip may betray a good mind into bad hands; and ignorance of the world may lead us into miſtakes about happineſs. We all agree in this—that where we place our confidence, we wiſh to be ſecure; and whether our notions of happineſs be correct or not, we wiſh to be happy. It is therefore our moſt intimate concern, to hearken to Almighty God, propoſing himſelf as the object of our truſt, and appealing in his holy word, and in the courſe of his providence, to the reaſon with which he hath endued us, for

the purity and ſolidity of the happineſs he offers.

We ſhould diſtruſt our own judgments, and examine, and doubt, whenever we feel ourſelves too confident in the power, or good ſenſe, or benevolence of other men. All theſe good qualities may, and frequently do, prove deficient, and expoſe to contempt the judgment we act upon. The ſame contempt will be more ſeverely felt, if the happineſs expected from them ſhould itſelf prove a deception.

I would obſerve, in the next place, if our text be true, that the earlier our confidence is repoſed in God, the better—the more it will be ſtrengthened, and anſwer the purpoſe of arming us, againſt the evils and the temptations in our way; of preparing us for a change of our being, and of qualifying us for a happy change. It is painful to be in a ſtate of diſtruſt towards the perſons, with whom we are conſtantly converſant.

verſant. This muſt have been perceived by men experienced in life. How miſerable, then, muſt be the ſituation of him, who hath no grounds to truſt in God, for with Him we have to do to the end of our lives. We can neither be happy here, nor depart in peace of mind from hence, if we are poſſeſſed with a dread of our Maker and Judge. A perfect truſt in God, on the contrary, will effectually ſecure the peace of our laſt moments.

Diſcontent, at any time, ariſes either from an apprehenſion, that we are leſs happy than we might be, or that we are expoſed to future evils. A filial confidence in God, will enable us to ſuppreſs both theſe imaginations. The omniſcient Being, who ſees our real intereſt, both preſent and future, being ſuppoſed the object of our truſt, ſuch diſquiet would ſeem to ariſe from a fooliſh preſumption, that we are or ought to be ſelf-

ſufficient,

ſufficient, and that it is an injury done us, to be reduced to a condition we diſlike.

At the approach of death, we particularly feel the great uſe or neceſſity of a full truſt in God. All the power of man cannot deliver us from that change; and after death, none of the men or things, in which we have here confided, can promote our happineſs. If we have a due confidence in God, even the proſpect of death and eternity will ſpeak peace to our ſouls. Now the ſtrongeſt grounds for this confidence are drawn from the Book of Life, the New Teſtament.

The beſt human characters are in ſome degree obnoxious to God's diſpleaſure. Not one of the ſons of men can pretend to an exemption from ſin. Whence, then, ſhall we draw our aſſurances, that our Almighty Judge is gracious and long-ſuffering, and will be merciful at the laſt? Not from our reaſon,

reaſon, which may convince any human underſtanding, of the goodneſs of God, but tells us at the ſame time, that he is juſt, and leaves a feeble mind in doubt, how his juſtice can be ſatisfied. Chriſtianity clears up the doubt, aſſuring us, that Divine Goodneſs extends even to ſinners, promiſing them pardon upon repentance.

Let us meditate upon this Infinity of Goodneſs, and adore it, as the only foundation for ſolid happineſs to the penitent Chriſtian, in this world and the next.

SERMON IV.

PROV. XXIII. 17.

LET NOT THINE HEART ENVY SINNERS.

THIS caution ſeems to be addreſſed to perſons engaged in a courſe of good life, upon religious principles. The proſperous or agreeable appearance aſſumed by ſinners, is a danger which beſets ſuch perſons in their paſſage through the world. They are adviſed not to envy the appearance, partly becauſe it is fallacious, and ſo not an object of Envy; and partly becauſe the diſagreeable paſſion of Envy, when once admitted into the heart, creates a deſire to excel, or at leaſt to imitate, the object of it.

The

The object of Envy, is rather the proſperity, than the happineſs of other men. We may diſtinguiſh proſperity from happineſs, becauſe we often ſee men happy, who are not proſperous; and others in poſſeſſion of what we call proſperity, who, if ingenuous, will confeſs, that they are not happy.

Happineſs is ſomething inward, unpretending, and ſubſtantial. It may ſubſiſt without external appearances, and it ſometimes doth ſubſiſt, where appearances ſeem to indicate miſery. It is within the reach of all men, and no man's poſſeſſion of it interferes with any other man's purſuit of it. It is, therefore, not an object of Envy. Who would envy a good man the peaceable, inoffenſive enjoyment of the happineſs, which reſults from goodneſs? or, who can be ſuſpected of envying a Chriſtian his well grounded aſſurance of God's favour?

But worldly proſperity, that ſplendid, fallacious diſplay of happineſs, will be envied, becauſe

becauſe there is not enough in the world for all the competitors—becauſe the aſpirers after it deſire more than their ſhare, and the poſſeſſors of it are oſtentatious of more than they have.

But we may obſerve farther, that the object of Envy is oftener the appearance of proſperity, than the reality of it. Envious men, not being governed by their reaſon, judge, like other unreaſonable men, from appearances; and inſtead of conſidering, and waiting to ſee, the duration of that, which has excited in them ſo odious and painful a paſſion, they abruptly give way to it, at the firſt ſight or ſound of a ſeeming proſperity, in which they are not partakers.

Hence, there is more of Envy in the world, than the quantity of real worldly proſperity will account for; and to many of thoſe who are themſelves tormented with this conſuming paſſion, may be applied what Eliphaz,

Eliphaz, in the book of Job, ſays of the fate of the perſon envied—" Envy ſlayeth " the ſilly one."

Now, as this alone ſeems a ſufficient caution to a reaſonable mind, to guard againſt the firſt advances of a paſſion, which always diſturb it—ſo the virtue of a good man will be unaffected by this danger, if he only conſiders, that all the glare of proſperity, as well as the life and cheerfulneſs aſſumed by the wicked, is nothing ſolid, but only a gloſs—the ſurface of a character, which, when removed or worn off, leaves nothing that any man, good or bad, would wiſh to poſſeſs.

The ſinners ſpoken of in the text, muſt be wilful, profeſſed, and ſucceſsful offenders againſt the laws of God and Nature.

If this ariſe from a denial of God—from that wild complication of abſurdity and credulity, called ſpeculative Atheiſm—we need not diſſuade the world from envying ſuch

ſuch a character, as a ſtate of happineſs; ſince, of all the misfortunes of the human heart and mind, it is the moſt to be pitied, as well as abhorred.

Atheiſm at once deprives the mind it enters, of every reaſonable and valuable comfort, hope, and joy; and it can leave nothing deſirable in their ſtead, unleſs a confidence, and pretended liberty, in ſinning, be deſirable. It is the confidence and liberty with which ideots and lunatics act, with only this difference, that theſe unhappy perſons have loſt their reaſon, whereas wicked men have caſt it off.

And is the liberty ariſing from hence to be envied? Indeed, it is not liberty, in any ſenſe of the word, as men, enſlaved to themſelves, have not, during the time of their deluſion, the power of acting freely. They exchange the free ſervice of God, for the dominion of one or more tyrants in their own breaſts, whom they obey with a ſervility,

ſervility, which, directed to any the moſt imperious tyrant, would be contemptible.

Or, if a ſinful courſe of life and converſation ſhould not proceed from a denial of all religion, but only from that inverted ſort of hypocriſy, which diſpoſes men of vanity to affect to be more wicked in their lives, than they are in their hearts, this is a caſe, which ſeems, if poſſible, leſs expoſed to Envy, than even that of the Atheiſt, as the man, who is ſelf-condemned, in the very act of ſin, muſt make a more deſpicable figure in his own ſight, than he who has at the time no ſenſe of his guilt.

In the ſight of God, he muſt be abominable; and with reſpect to other men, we know, that though affectation in general is only contemptible, the affectation of wickedneſs is a deformity, very diſguſting when preſented to better minds. It may be ſet off with entertaining circumſtances; but it muſt be a feeble underſtanding, that is miſ-

led from the paths of virtue, to envy the man, who proſtitutes his talents in the ſerious profeſſion of impiety.

Yet theſe affected ſinners have their imitators. Perſons, in themſelves well diſpoſed, at ſome unguarded times may be abſent from themſelves and their good principles; and being deſerted by the hold, which religion had on their minds, may be ſo ſmitten with a mere piece of levity, as to forget from whence it proceeds, and whither it tends.

Solomon being ſenſible that this is frequently the account of the matter, when good men envy ſinners, adds to the words of the text, "but be thou in the fear of the "Lord all the day long."

His meaning ſeems to be, that a preſent ſenſe of Religion will have the ſame effect, which preſence of mind has in other caſes. It will explain the character of the man, and the nature and tendency of the arts, by which he ſeduces his innocent fellow-creatures.

tures. Upon the diſcovery of theſe inſinuating arts, a wicked character, however circumſtanced, will appear to be far from deſirable in itſelf; and the imitation of it cannot produce happineſs, the original being compounded of ſome of the natural, and all the moral cauſes of miſery.

There is nothing tempting in SIN itſelf. When we ſpeak of a temptation, we do not mean the guilt, but ſome profit or pleaſure ſuppoſed to attend it; for Sin, conſidered abſtractedly, is odious, whatever the object of it is; and before the ſinful perſon can recommend himſelf to the world, he muſt have recourſe to ſuch things, as conceal the blemiſhes of his mind.

Mankind is commonly prepoſſeſſed in favour of vivacity, wit, health, and good humour; but as theſe gifts of nature are remarkably periſhable in bad hands, they cannot long operate as a cloak of wickedneſs. They cannot long adminiſter to it either

covering, or ornament; for the latent paſſion or appetite will be impatient to break through the diſguiſe, and ſo expoſe itſelf, that thoſe valuable talents only aggravate the diſgrace, which they are employed to prevent.

So far, then, is the Sinner from being an object of Envy, that his beſt qualities of mind and body, which with a better character might have ſecured him reſpect, gradually loſe their conſequence, and he becomes at beſt inſignificant to the world, before his known ſinful courſe hath completed the work of extinguiſhing him.

If he be a mere animal character, diſtinguiſhed by a redundance of animal ſpirits, and a profeſſed devotion to animal appetites, his parts and ſenſe may give a more ſeductive appearance to his ſins; but even they, popular as they are, will not protect him from an obſervation ſuggeſted by nature—that rational beings, who look

no

no farther than preſent pleaſure, level themſelves, at leaſt, with animals who can look no farther.

Even the more ſober ſins of unprincipled Ambition, and ſordid Avarice, cannot with any conſiſtency be approved or envied, in their higheſt ſucceſs, by a conſiderate mind. Ambition, in the bad ſenſe of the word, and Avarice, which will not admit of a good ſenſe, are ſo unbecoming our condition, ſo unſuitable to the knowledge we have of the ſhortneſs of our lives, and of the great uncertainty of every human project—and at the ſame time ſo miſchievous to the world, as well as to our own temper, peace of mind, and character—that they have no fair pretenſion to be envied, by the men who admire their ſucceſs. When they are accompanied with great abilities, the main work of thoſe abilities is to diſguiſe them, and to give a natural air to the maſk in which they appear.

When they ſucceed, indeed, they may chance to meet with applauſe, and excite Envy; but as a well-diſpoſed and conſiderate mind will not applaud them, ſo it is a departure from good principles to envy them.

A change in the external condition of any man, is too uncertain, and too little underſtood, to provoke Envy in a reaſonable mind, even when that change is honourably obtained; but it is never an apology for wrong means practiſed in the purſuit of it, whether the change be the conqueſt of a country, or the exaltation of a family, or the acquiſition of a fortune.

None of theſe, give a good man reaſon to be diſſatisfied with himſelf, when he obſerves them to be founded in violence or injuſtice. The happineſs he enjoys, in not being capable of the means, will perfectly reconcile him to a condition leſs ſplendid, than that of the able, ſucceſsful ſinner; eſpecially

eſpecially if he conſiders, farther, the deceitfulneſs of ſin, which gradually hardens the mind, and thus renders the proſperous ſucceſs of it a very great evil.

Adverſity has been called very juſtly the ſchool of virtue. Proſperity is capable of virtue, and of very high degrees of it; but the proſperity of a profeſſed ſinner, is, in the end, the worſt ſtate of life he can fall into, as it confirms him in that neglect of religious and moral obligation, which, if it ſhould not immediately affect the powers of underſtanding, certainly extinguiſhes the light of conſcience—without which, paſſion is blind, and underſtanding miſtakes its object.

But ſtill we are told, that ſucceſs will make an impreſſion, in ſpite of moral or pious reaſoning, and that it is a fact not to be ſurmounted, that unwearied Ambition and Avarice are moſt commonly ſucceſsful.

It cannot be denied, that ſucceſs will ſtrike ſuperficial minds. But before we give theſe pretended happy men the full credit of ſucceſs, let us follow them to their end.

After a life ſpent in the purſuit and the enjoyment of falſe happineſs, they muſt ſome time betake themſelves to reſt, and then the glittering of their ſucceſs appears to have been all a deluſion. They cannot reſt, for they cannot avoid reflection. Solitude, which ſeems to be freedom from every immediate moleſtation or danger, is to them a ſtate of Terror. The mind is then diſpoſſeſſed of ſo much of its former contents as conveyed pleaſure, and nothing pleaſing ſucceeds to fill up the chaſm.

Or if the Impiety of ſuch men be ſtrong enough to ſuppreſs reflection, and bid defiance to the terrors of ſolitude; if they can

can even face death with an horrible intrepidity, "let not thine heart envy them." It is not fortitude, which can only be founded in virtue. It is a mere ſtate of inſenſibility, the reſult of either folly or madneſs.

Wiſdom produces either repentance, or joy, in the laſt moments of life. If ſhe is hearkened to early, ſhe will lay the foundation of an happy end. Even late in life, ſhe continues to ſtretch out her hands to thoſe, who have looked down with ſcorn and deriſion upon the maxims of Solomon. They have many intimations in their own experience, whether they examine themſelves, or the world about them, that they are not either enjoying, or purſuing, true happineſs: and a greater than Solomon gives us ſome pictures of ſinners of various kinds, by no means calculated to excite Envy.

He deſcribes the diſtreſſes of a prodigal, who

who had wantonly diſſipated his ſubſtance in riotous living. He repreſents the final fate of a voluptuous man, who had in his lifetime rejected authentic warnings of a future ſtate, and now has a bitter experience of his profligate error. He expoſes, on many occaſions, the folly and ſin of falſe Ambition, and Hypocriſy united, in the character of a ſet of men, who were then remarkably diſtinguiſhed by the high pretenſions to piety and virtue, which they laboured to ſupport by falſe appearances. He ſhews the vanity of the man, who truſted in the poſſeſſions he had accumulated, by repreſenting him as receiving notice of death, on the very day, when he had determined to enjoy his uncertain wealth.

Theſe are all characters drawn from nature, and recorded for our admonition. They give us a different view of the proſperous ſinner from that which may, in the time of his pro-

proſperity, ſtrike the imagination of other men, unſupported by ſound underſtanding. Thoſe characters direct us to the right uſe of ſuch examples of wickedneſs, as fall in our way. We ſhall not be tempted to envy or imitate them, if we only look forward beyond the preſent moment. We ſhall be ſparing of cenſure, and abſtinent from reproach, if we conſider, that ſoon or late the ſin produces its own puniſhment.

We ſhall compaſſionate every man who loſes his way, in departing from the only paths of peace; and if we cannot diſcover to him his error, before he ſees it himſelf, perhaps too late to correct it, we may at leaſt gather inſtruction and comfort to ourſelves, from obſerving the principles, the progreſs, and the end, of a ſinful life.

It begins with a ſhort-lived, deceitful pleaſure; is carried on with a thoughtleſs neglect

neglect of every thing that conduces to real happineſs; and ends in Remorſe for what is paſt, and Horror at what is to come.

SERMON V.

LUKE X. 25.

WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?

THE queſtion was propoſed to our Saviour by a man of ſome eminence in the Jewiſh Church. It is ſaid by the Evangeliſt, that he tempted him in aſking it. We read of ſeveral enſnaring queſtions put to our Lord. It was a natural artifice of the Jewiſh Doctors, who ſaw his miracles, and could not reproach his life, to attempt to draw from him ſome declaration, which might be conſtrued into hereſy or ſedition. The queſtion before us, had the former tendency, as it is the moſt conſiderable

able queſtion in religion; and the anſwer to it was commonly meant to recommend ſome one or other of the principal religions profeſſed in the world.

But though the deſign of this queſtion was thus diſingenuous, we may derive inſtruction from conſidering even that. When a Jewiſh Scribe came to tempt a Teacher, at whoſe underſtanding and anſwers all who heard him, very early, had been aſtoniſhed, we may ſuppoſe, that the queſtion he would offer to him was of very great importance.

We may likewiſe ſuppoſe, that, when an artful man came to lay this ſnare, he would contrive to beſpeak our Saviour's good opinion, in order to get at a frank, unguarded anſwer. It was natural, therefore, to aſk a queſtion, which might ſeem to reſult from an honeſt heart, deſirous of inſtruction, and intent upon the main purpoſe of Religion—Acceptance with God.

Such was this very queſtion. If an undeſigning

deſigning man had propoſed it, he would have appeared in the favourable light of one, who, having conſidered eternal life as the moſt deſirable of all good—and having learnt from his own reflection the great probability, and from his religion the certainty of it—was anxious to know the terms upon which this ineſtimable bleſſing may be obtained.

We have here, then, a queſtion, which, as it is more or leſs attended to, diſtinguiſhes the man, who only ſpeculates and diſputes about Religion, from the man who has it ſeriouſly at heart. It is the mark, by which to diſcern true wiſdom from falſe; and it points out in all caſes, where it is ſincerely put, ſo far as integrity is concerned, the moſt proper object of eſteem and confidence among men; ſince he, who has it at heart to know what he ſhall do to inherit eternal life, has none of thoſe ends

to

to anſwer, for which men injure or deceive one another.

We may therefore take this queſtion out of the hands of the Scribe, who propoſed it inſidiouſly; and conſider it as the natural meditation of a ſerious, ſolid, thoughtful mind.

Firſt. It is moſt natural for a SERIOUS mind to apply itſelf to ſubjects, either really or apparently intereſting. If man had no intereſt beyond this life, a ſerious mind would be engaged in the buſineſs of it; for the joys of the world are too ſhort, and too unſubſtantial, to attract the whole attention of ſuch a mind. It would turn to ſomething of uſe beyond the preſent moment; to the purſuit of knowledge, or to advance a fortune, or to ſomething elſe of real uſe to his objects in this life.

But as a ſerious turn of mind has a tendency to the graveſt of all ſubjects, as being the

the moſt intereſting, it would be led, by experiencing the end of all human purſuits, to ſomething beyond the preſent ſtate. It would not be diſpoſed to ridicule what we are told of a future ſtate, for ridicule is not one of the faculties of a ſerious mind. A moderate underſtanding may obſerve, that this world has not happineſs enough to ſatisfy the deſires of man. Whoever ſeriouſly conſiders THAT, will from the nature of man conclude, that there is probably another life, and from the juſtice and goodneſs of God, that man is accountable hereafter. The promiſes and threatenings of revealed religion, confirm theſe concluſions of a ſerious mind, by ſuch poſitive declarations, that it muſt be deeply affected by the comforts and terrors, which lie before us all, according to the merits of our caſe.

Filled with this reaſonable belief of another world, a grave character cannot miſs the enquiry, What ſhall I do to inherit eter-

nal Life? It will as naturally occur, as an enquiry after the means of any desirable End. If the person so prepared for this train of thought, has never entered into worldly views, it will immediately occur. If he has experienced, where and how they terminate, no other enquiry remains for the exercise of his faculties.

Hence, men of a serious turn of mind are generally observed to be religious. They are innocently chearful perhaps, for gloominess proceeds either from false religion, or from a bad constitution of body; but, in general, religious men are serious men, especially upon so interesting a subject as this. They will set earnestly about it, suffer nothing to divert them from it, nor amuse the time which the consideration of this point demands, with objects of infinitely less consequence, and fitted only for those who are sure, if any man could be so, that the human existence is confined to the present life.

In

In the next place, the queſtion before us is naturally matter of meditation in a SOLID mind, which penetrates through the ſurface of things, and receives not lightly an impreſſion from tranſitory objects. Such a mind is diſencumbered from whatever captivates the giddy, thoughtleſs part of the world. If it chance to deſcend to trifles, for a temporary reſt to its faculties, they cannot long poſſeſs or affect it. The miſtakes about happineſs, which overpower weaker underſtandings, and ſometimes lead men into the keeneſt purſuit of a ſhadow, can find no place, where the man is formed and diſpoſed to examine the value and duration of the ſeveral objects before him. A ſolid underſtanding, and a vain heart, may ſometimes appear to meet in the ſame perſon; but it is clear, that in proportion as the latter predominates, the ſolidity of the former muſt viſibly diminiſh.

Truth being the natural food of the mind, and the moſt important truth that, from which a ſolid mind can derive ſuſtenance, whatever merely pretends to give happineſs, whether it be great, or only ſplendid, will not excite its appetite. As its progreſs in knowledge will be rapid and beneficial, becauſe it rejects, or leaves unnoticed, the uſeleſs diſquiſitions which detain other men, and paſſes on to matters which lead more directly to diſcovery or demonſtration; ſo in religion it will fix upon the weightier matters of the law, and no ſooner be convinced of a future ſtate, than conclude, that the knowledge of the way that leadeth to life, and the ſatisfaction of having walked in it, is the one thing needful to man—the thing which alone can bring him peace at the laſt, which, therefore, whoſo is wiſe will principally conſider.

This queſtion, in the third place, is the natural employment of a THOUGHTFUL mind, a mind

a mind that can ſubſiſt upon its own reflections, that is always active in obſerving, recollecting and reaſoning, and prefers ſolitude and peace to every, even agreeable, interruption of a train of thought. Such a mind may be employed about the great appearances in nature, or about the operations of human underſtanding, or about the principles of morals, or about the beſt model for civil ſociety; but it cannot fail, in the courſe of theſe ſpeculations, to meet with ſomething that leads to the relation between God and man, and to the conſequence of it—the doctrine of a future ſtate. As this occurred to all the heathen philoſophers and moraliſts, it cannot eſcape a thoughtful man among us. He will ſeize upon the idea naturally, if it were only as a new fund for ſpeculation; and when he perceives the great object more diſtinctly, with the aid of the Goſpel, he will not reſt without a ſatisfactory anſwer to the queſtion of my text.

It belongs to inferior animals to think only of what is preſent to their ſenſes. They have ſomething like ideas, which they can aſſociate, and apply to the purpoſe of their exiſtence. Man having a farther exiſtence before him, has powers adapted to the attainment of it. He can bring paſt, and future, into preſent view. This is his excellence in this viſible creation, and men excel one another in proportion to the uſe they make of their power of conſidering the paſt, the preſent, and the future.

The more thoughtful the man is, the farther he will penetrate into remote ages; the leſs he will be confined to the world before us, knowing that the world and its inhabitants muſt paſs away, and having the ſtrongeſt grounds to be perſuaded, that there is a world to come, and to wiſh for a ſhare in the happy part of that world. The faculties, therefore, of a thoughtful mind will of courſe be applied to the ſureſt means of attaining ſo valuable

valuable an end. If either thoſe means or that end are overlooked, there muſt be a defect of underſtanding or wiſdom. It is plain, the thoughtful mind has not purſued its ſpeculations to the point to which they ultimately tend.

We have conſidered the queſtion before us, as occurring naturally to ſuch men as are eſteemed and reſpected in the world, whatever ſtation they fill in it. There is an authority reſulting from the reputation of a ſerious, ſolid, thoughtful mind, which gives importance to every ſubject, about which ſuch a mind is moſt likely to be converſant, and therefore recommends this queſtion to the conſideration of us all. There is, on the other ſide, ſo manifeſt a levity and inconſideration in neglecting to think of the means of obtaining eternal life, that we may ſay, with the utmoſt truth and propriety, of that numerous body of men who are chargeable with this neglect, what, if ſaid of any indivi-

dual among them, would appear like invective—that their minds are neither ſerious, nor ſolid, nor thoughtful. So that the credit of underſtanding, which moſt men would wiſh to ſupport in the world, is at ſtake in their religious characters.

But the queſtion before us, has more to recommend it. All men have not the pride of underſtanding, but all have an idea of happineſs, and would wiſh, at the cloſe of their lives, to have the hopes of ETERNAL happineſs. They may ſecure thoſe hopes, by attending early and ſincerely to this queſtion. An anxious enquiry after the means of eternal life will remove impediments to it out of our way. It immediately diverts us from whatever goes by the name of vice or folly, from whatever doth public or private miſchief.

If we are ignorant of what is to be *done* to inherit eternal life, yet we muſt know, what is to be *avoided;* for ſin and wickedneſs of any ſort, diſſoluteneſs, injuſtice, malice

lice and ſuch like, evidently tend to another point. Theſe, therefore, are of courſe ſet aſide, when we think of an happy eternity. We become at once, by only conſidering in earneſt, how to arrive at That, better, more worthy, and more reſpectable characters, than the purſuit of any worldly point can make us. So far it obviates moral evil.

It has its effect too upon natural evil, by rendering that much more tolerable than it is to a mind, whoſe thoughts are confined to the preſent ſtate. What is pain or misfortune of any ſort to him, who aſpires to eternity? It is rather an incentive to his purſuit, ſince he, who feels this life uncomfortable in any reſpect, will in common ſenſe deſire to qualify himſelf for a better; and then all the uneaſy ſenſations of ſickneſs, of diſappointment, or vexation of any other kind, are ſoftened by the proſpect of things eternal.

Inward

Inward tranquillity was all that heathen philoſophy could promiſe; and it required ſome exertion of a good underſtanding to attain that. Long life and proſperity in the land, which the Lord their God gave them, was all that the bulk of the Jewiſh nation had reaſon to look for, from the declarations of their law. Eternal life was the ſanction reſerved for the Chriſtian law. The Diſciple who ſaid to our Saviour, "Lord, to whom "ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of "eternal life," plainly meant, that it was in vain to go to any other teacher, who had leſs to offer, and that it was of the higheſt conſequence, of indiſpenſable neceſſity to our happineſs, to follow him, who had the words, or brought the promiſe, of eternal life.

Farther than this, no wiſh of the human heart can extend; and the moſt laudable ambition bears teſtimony to the value of it; for when

when men endeavour, by meritorious actions, to immortalize their names, they acknowledge the value of ſomething, that barely reſembles immortality, by being more durable than other worldly objects. But their fame cannot exiſt beyond the ages to which this world is limited. It would be a contradiction, to ſuppoſe eternal life to have any bounds.

That eternal happineſs goes along with it, need hardly be mentioned. It is ſuppoſed in the offer, and expreſsly promiſed in various paſſages of the New Teſtament. What a noble object would this be for the ſeekers after happineſs, with whom the world abounds, if they would only enlarge their minds, and prefer the gratification of the beſt and moſt rational wiſh, to that of preſent ſenſe, or preſent paſſion.

The object itſelf is indeed too deſirable to be treated with neglect. It muſt, therefore, be ſome ſuppoſed difficulty in the means, that occaſions

occaſions the neglect of ſuch an end. But the means are difficult only in proportion to our attachment to ſomething foreign to, or inconſiſtent with, the attainment of eternal life.

All the bleſſings of heaven are in their own nature eaſily attainable. We experience this in our ſubſiſtence, our health, and peace of mind. When God ſent us an offer of eternal life, it was agreeable to his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, to fit the terms to all capacities and ſtations.

That he has done ſo, is apparent from the anſwer our Saviour gave to the Scribe. He referred him to the law, of which this man knew and confeſſed the authority, and when he quoted from thence the great precepts of the Love of God and our neighbour, our Lord ſaid, "thou haſt anſwered right; "this do, and thou ſhalt live."

If a Chriſtian were to propoſe the ſame queſtion, he might be anſwered in like manner.

manner. "What is written in the CHRIS-"TIAN law? how readeſt thou?" He would there find the Saviour of the world ſaying, "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, he that "heareth my word, and believeth in Him "that ſent me, hath everlaſting life." This is not all; but the reſt will follow of courſe.

"He that verily believeth in God, and "in Jeſus Chriſt, whom he hath ſent, will "love him;" and he ſaith further, "If a "man love me, he will keep my words." The words he means are in the fifth, ſixth, and ſeventh chapters of St. Matthew's Goſpel; and, in the ſubſtance of what his Apoſtles preached to them, who believed in him, was, "Repent, and be converted, that "your ſins may be blotted out." He had, by his meritorious death, blotted out the ſins of thoſe who believe in him and repent. The further anſwer, therefore, to the enquiring Chriſtian, would be from his Saviour,

Follow

Follow me, who brought the promiſe of eternal life from heaven; forſake your ſins; ſet your affections on things above; place your heart where your real treaſure is; and you may ſecurely truſt in GOD, and in JESUS CHRIST, for ETERNAL LIFE.

SERMON VI.

[*Preached before the Houſe of Lords, Jan.* 30, 1789.]

PROV. XVII. 14.

THE BEGINNING OF STRIFE IS AS WHEN ONE LETTETH OUT WATER.

THE original words, rendered STRIFE and CONTENTION in this verſe, apply chiefly to private litigations between individuals; but the Wiſe Man's admonition, is full as applicable to vehement diſcord between parties in the ſame community, whoſe numbers, as well as the greater importance of the conteſt, muſt proportionably extend or aggravate the evils of ſtrife, and have, in ſome caſes, prolonged the duration of them to the dreadful period of general ruin.

They

They who live in turbulent times, have ample experience of the truth of Solomon's obſervation ſo applied; and it is confirmed more or leſs by the hiſtories of civil wars, whether partially or impartially written. The facts, in which they all agree, ſhew, from the progreſſion and end of moſt of thoſe wars, that the beginning of them was like the opening a ſluice, or breaking down a dam; for it brought on calamities rapid, irreſiſtible, and comprehenſively deſtructive.

Some of the various cauſes of ſo terrible and complicated a miſchief may, by ſagacious writers, be traced back to a remote period, when none of the evils, imputed to them, were apprehended, or could be deſigned. But as ſuch an inveſtigation might be mere hiſtorical curioſity, it would not apply ſo immediately to religious and moral inſtruction, as if we content ourſelves with knowing

knowing the known promoters of a violent civil conteſt to be, in moſt, if not all caſes, the human paſſions, which are exerted early on one ſide or both.

Difference of opinion about principles of government, or about public meaſures, or claims of right peaceably aſſerted, are ſo far from falling within the malignant meaning of ſtrife and contention, that it would be opprobrious language to call them by that name. The ſtrife of my text has no tendency to peace or public good, and is never conducted by fair argument.

When the neceſſary ſteps towards public hoſtilities are avowedly taken, the work of ſober diſcuſſion is at once ſuperſeded by the machinations of ambition, or the wild efforts of anger, hatred, and malice. Then ſtrife and contention are evidently at work; and the land and its inhabitants are ſoon overflowed by the evils, which it is the end of ſociety to prevent.

The firſt breach of UNION, that fundamental principle of ſocial life, is not indeed in every caſe irreparable: temper and conceſſions may heal it. But though theſe be the obvious remedies, they are ſeldom ſo immediately at hand, as the natural conſequences are of public ſtrife. Law and government may be relaxed, before the minds of men are calm enough to hearken to terms of peace. In the mean time, the ſtability of every houſe may be ſhaken, and a kingdom thus divided againſt itſelf may, before the day of negociation, be ſo far advanced towards ruin, that it cannot ſtand.

Nor has the courſe of this miſery much chance of relief from TIME—that natural emollient of private animoſities, that friend of man in the common troubles of life. The ſalutary operation of it is obſtructed by the unavoidable effect of a public flame. Mutual provocations contribute a daily ſupply of fuel, and, in ſome caſes, have preſerved the

the diſcord alive, till the original ſubject of it has been nearly forgotten.

A people ſo agitated by public ſtrife and private reſentments, become gradually licentious in the purſuit of their object. The genuine principles of religion and morality muſt loſe their hold of ſuch minds, and indeed are diſcountenanced as uſeleſs. Activity and perſeverance in a cauſe, not neceſſarily connected with religion or morals, perhaps very diſtant from both, are the only virtue and honour in vogue, and have been often received as a compenſation for great defects in character. It has been moreover obſerved in a nation ſo convulſed, that minds perhaps originally good, or at leaſt inoffenſive, have loſt that horror of guilt, which is naturally felt in peaceable times, and thus become qualified for every extremity to which unbridled paſſions tend.

In addition to all this, hiſtory informs us,

that there are evils reſulting from a general ferment of bitter animoſities, which may be quite out of ſight in the beginning of STRIFE. Such, for inſtance, is the contingent acceſſion of inflammatory matter from adventitious parties, no otherwiſe connected with the general diſeaſe, than as that is the harbour of every ill humour; and it muſt happen, that in the natural changes incident in time to all human deſigns, by the death or verſatility of the conductors, men of the pureſt intention may be diſappointed, in ſeeing a cauſe, originally good, devolve into bad hands.

In the mean time, the wiſeſt and beſt men, qualified to ſave their country in this extreme diſtreſs, by the authority annexed to ſuperior underſtanding and probity, are driven by the times into obſcurity, the only ſhelter from diſcord, hypocriſy, and all the ſucceſsful iniquity which has taken poſſeſſion of the

the world. A whole nation, deſtitute of only a few ſuch men, may periſh at a time when wiſdom is more wanted than ſtrength.

It is one of the known meaſures of divine adminiſtration, to leave both nations and individuals, obſtinately ſinful, to their own counſel, as the means of puniſhing them by their own hands. We have an inſtance in ſcripture of a national revolt accompliſhed, by placing the inſtruments of divine vengeance in this very ſtate of derelict̃ion.

When it was determined by the ſupreme governor of the Jewiſh ſtate, to puniſh the apoſtacy of SOLOMON, by ſeparating ten of the tribes from the government of his deſcendants, the infatuated conduct of REHOBOAM, and the fury it excited, brought about, without a miracle, as ſignal a revolution as any we meet with in hiſtory.

The wiſe maxims of Solomon's better days, though not perhaps yet collected in a body, muſt have been recent and familiar to

all the tribes of Iſrael. But when the nation was exaſperated at the anſwer they had received from Rehoboam, it is obſervable, that there was either not a man to recal to their minds the words of my text, or his moderation was overpowered by the general cry, "TO YOUR TENTS, O ISRAEL!"

Such a friend to his country might have ſuſpended a reſolution, juſtly provoked indeed, but pregnant with apparent miſchief to themſelves and poſterity. Something might have been urged in extenuation of an anſwer, which was ill adviſed; and, from the expreſſion of it in the moſt extravagant flight of figurative language, appeared to be the reſult of mere paſſion. It might have been pleaded, that they ought in prudence to wait for ſome actual outrage; that they might and ought to reſiſt, if he perſevered; but that, in the mean time, "THE BEGIN-"NING OF STRIFE IS AS WHEN ONE LET-"TETH OUT WATER."

Some

Some ſuch advice as this might have diſpirited Jeroboam's party, but the divine purpoſe prevented it, by leaving the revolt to be carried on by men enraged, following the natural impulſe of their provocation. The people became abruptly as wild as their Prince, and being either deſtitute of better counſel, or deaf to it, became the proper inſtruments of God's vengeance upon the ingratitude of Solomon.

So here was a deciſive judgment, to the diſcredit of civil commotions; for it is evident from the hiſtory, that the fitteſt inſtruments of public confuſion were deemed to be bodies of men acting without reflection, without advice, incited and united merely by the irrational motives of anger, hatred, malice, or, at the beſt, blind party-zeal.

In applying obſervations of this ſort to the laſt century, we are not called upon to decide the queſtions then agitated. We are directed, by the appointment of this day, to

look back with horror at the guilt we commemorate, which may be done without entering into the allegations of either ſide. The tragedy before us, was not the concluſion of an argument. It was the conſummation of civil fury. The unfortunate King could not be intended to be brought, in all ſubſequent ages, before another incompetent tribunal, by a ſolemn anniverſary diſcuſſion of his cauſe. Indeed, this ſeems to have been prevented, by a reſolution, laid down by the legiſlature as a fundamental principle of the conſtitution, declaring the perſon of the king ſacred, and that reſolution ſeems to be the baſis of the inſtitution of this day. It would be a ſolemn mockery of God, to continue the obſervation of the day, if the avowed murder of a ſovereign prince, in cold blood, were the known privilege of his ſubjects.

So that his perſon being conſtitutionally exempt from all violence, except only the mere

mere accidents of a day of battle; we have before us, in his caſe, a melancholy inſtance of the improvement of iniquity, by long practice; by familiarity with blood; by habitual contempt of the reſtraints which have ſometimes kept back the worſt men from a new and horrible crime; by ſubſtituting, in the room of a ſenſe of moral duty, notions of political neceſſity, as of equal obligation; by trampling under foot thoſe forms of juſtice, which had ſubſiſted from the earlieſt periods of our hiſtory; and, rather than not perpetrate the moſt atrocious of all acts, erecting a tribunal quite unknown, and, to the honour of the ſuffering Prince, not ſubmitted to by him.

I mentioned before, that we are not bound, by the appointment of this day, to argue the merits of the caſe. We are required ſingly to direct our view to the crying ſin before us. But it unfortunately happens, that we are not permitted to indulge unmoleſted

unmoleſted the patriotic grief, ariſing in good minds from a retroſpect to the national diſgrace, this day incurred. There are thoſe, who conſider the matter differently, and at this diſtance of time, when few are prepared to anſwer them, diſturb the devout obſervers of this day with a flat contradiction to the grounds of the inſtitution of it; aſſerting repeatedly, that the whole tranſaction was unexceptionably juſt.

I will not preſume to detain this audience with diſcuſſing a matter decided ſo long ago; but muſt beg leave to obſerve briefly, that to make the act of this day unexceptionably juſt, it ſeems neceſſary, that the character of the Royal Sufferer ſhould have been remarkably obnoxious;—that his guilt ſhould be indiſputably clear;—that his enemies ſhould be honourably poſſeſſed of his perſon, and that he ſhould be tried in the forms of the conſtitution which he was ſaid to have violated.

Now

Now, in each of theſe reſpects, the whole tranſaction was notoriouſly defective.

His character was known to be excellent, and has been tranſmitted to us, by the beſt authorities, as exemplary in a high degree.

His guilt could not be indiſputably clear, for we have no legal evidence of ANY. The trial being a mere mockery of juſtice, nothing more can be concluded againſt him from thence, than that his life was an obſtacle to the further views of his perſecutors. Perhaps it might have been ſpared, had the nation in general been diſpoſed at that time to acknowledge any ſupreme but him. This being more than their ſucceſs warranted them to expect, they thought it expedient, that he ſhould die, and invented a murder, which might inſpire general terror, by operating as a defiance of law, juſtice, and humanity.

They could not well plead, that they were fairly poſſeſſed of his perſon. We know, that

that he did not fall into their hands by the mere chance of war. If that ſhould be alleged, then they were confeſſedly guilty of a violation of the laws of war, known only among ſavage nations for many centuries paſt.

The incompetency of the court by which he was tried, which alone was ſufficient to vitiate all their proceedings, is ſo clear, that it would be loſs of time to inſiſt upon it.

And thus this pretended act of juſtice, all theſe exceptions to it conſidered, is left to labour under its true deſcription, of the moſt flagrant injuſtice and inhumanity, unworthy of Engliſhmen, of ſoldiers, of good citizens, and of ſerious chriſtians.

It aſtoniſhed all Europe, as a fact incredible; it put an end to the life of a King, who ſhewed by his death, how well he deſerved to live; it ſent his family into exile, where they actually and largely imbibed the obnoxious principles of religion and government

ment imputed to him, and became unfit to fill his throne; and it ſuſpended for a ſeaſon a conſtitution, which was happily too vigorous to be for ever aboliſhed by the moſt daring violence.

A guilt of this horrible magnitude, with all its circumſtances new in the hiſtory of mankind, was the produce of a long CIVIL WAR, and ſo became a ſtriking admonition to all poſterity, that, however dreadful other public calamities may be, there is none, except eſtabliſhed tyranny, ſo dreadful, as that confuſion of crimes, vices, ill humours, rapacious violences, and diabolical deſigns, which conſtitute a civil war.

May we of the preſent reign, enjoying every bleſſing ſociety can give, and moſt of them ſuch as that generation had not the leaſt ground to hope for, retain ſuch a ſenſe of our happineſs, as may ſecure us, to as diſtant a period as national happineſs can reach, from all danger of thoſe complicated miſeries,

miſeries, attendant upon a people ſeparated from their God, at hoſtile variance with their king, weary of the conſtitution of their government, and raſhly ſporting away their civil and domeſtic happineſs!

SERMON VII.

I TIM. II. 19.

LET EVERY ONE THAT NAMETH THE NAME OF CHRIST DEPART FROM INIQUITY.

TIMOTHY, to whom ST. PAUL had committed the Church of EPHESUS, ſeems to have been alarmed at the appearance of falſe Teachers, who had crept in, to obſtruct the growth of that Church into a Chriſtian Eſtabliſhment.

The Apoſtle comforts him with an aſſurance, that all is ſafe; that Chriſtianity, the foundation of God, ſtandeth ſure, having this SEAL or Security from Heaven, that "the Lord knoweth them that are his," and has a ſufficient number of them in reſerve to conſtitute a permanent Church.

This

This is the great aſſurance from God himſelf, to which the Apoſtle adds an admonition to Chriſtians to do their part to keep up the number, by every one's departing from iniquity, who nameth the name of Chriſt—an obvious infallible ſecurity for the permanency of the Chriſtian Church, which may be applied, in the Apoſtle's ſenſe, as one of the foundations, which ſtand ſure againſt profane and vain babblers.

Naming the name of Chriſt, is a phraſe, which ſeems to import the profeſſing ourſelves to be Chriſtians; and departing from iniquity is the ſame conduct, which in other paſſages is deſcribed by "denying ungod-" lineſs and worldly luſts, living ſoberly, " righteouſly and godlily in this preſent " world; maintaining good works; walk-" ing worthy of God, unblameable and un-" reproveable in his ſight."

Theſe are the ſcriptural deſcriptions of true profeſſors of Chriſtianity. It is manifeſtly

nifeſtly inconſiſtent in them to anſwer an oppoſite deſcription, and the guilt of it would be an aggravation of Ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, as it would falſify a Profeſſion, upon which they pretend to found their Credit in this life, and their Hopes in the next.

It is one of the diſtinctions of human nature to be capable of Inconſiſtency. Other Animals follow the direction and impulſe of their Senſes, and moſt of them have neither temptation nor capacity, to depart from one uniform courſe. Man has his Reaſon, and Laws of different kinds, to direct him; but being more than a machine, he has it in his power to pervert his reaſon, and to go aſtray from the path which he knows would lead him to Life.

This unhappy faculty, if it may be ſo called, is inſeparable from the privilege he enjoys of being a free agent, and is, indeed, one proof, that he is ſo, conſidering the

powerful motives and encouragements he has, to be uniform and conſiſtent.

But though Inconſiſtency of this ſort be peculiar to man, it is far from being a privilege, the exerciſe of which does him honour. There is, on the contrary, ſomething ſo unworthy, if fully conſidered, of a rational being, in departing from profeſſed good principles, that men ſeldom avow it. The better ſort obſerve it in others, either with concern, or with contempt; perſons injured by it, complain of it with indignation; and the very apologies generally made for it, imply, that it is matter of Reproach.

It is certainly diſgraceful to the underſtanding, which we derive from our omniſcient God. It is in effect dethroning the higher powers of our nature, Reason and Conscience: and this Treaſon againſt ourſelves cannot be committed by a thinking mind, without firſt wreſting the laws of God and

and man, to draw from them a connivance at the wrong, which in their plain and obvious ſenſe they diſapprove.

This ſeems to be the true ſtate of the Inconſiſtency of Intelligent Beings, who would be thought Chriſtians, and many, who think themſelves ſo, without acting up to the knowledge and belief they profeſs; for the profligacy of another ſet, who know what is right, and do wrong in open defiance of it, belongs not to this ſubject, as it is a ſenſeleſs daring outrage, not within the reach of ſober expoſtulation.

Conſiſtency is, in theory, indiſpenſable in all parts of life, in all the mutual tranſactions amongſt men. When ſerious Profeſſions are made, it is of great conſequence to the neceſſary intercourſe of the world, that they ſhould be Sincere; and though the profeſſions of Benevolence, which men owe to one another, are not always underſtood in the moſt rigorous ſenſe, Cuſtom, and what is call-

ed Good breeding, having diminiſhed their current value, yet there is a mode of expreſſing theſe ſo, as to place them in many caſes above mere FORMS of ſpeech, and obtain for them ſome credit.

But though men are not expected to be equally cordial in the uſe of ſuch expreſſions, they are not tolerated by the world, and many not by themſelves, in flatly counteracting them. To ſay one thing, and be diſcovered to do another, is not juſtified by any refinements of caſuiſtry. The maſters of that art have not yet been ſo ingenious, as to confound the original ideas of RIGHT and WRONG, or to give a permanent air of rectitude to a plain contradiction between our words and actions; it being indiſputable, that uniformity of action forms conſiſtency of character, and that this will naturally produce a perfect character.

It would, therefore, be a diſcovery of extenſive value to mankind, to hit upon ſome great

great principle of action, applicable to our whole conduct in life, which might ſingly, if it were always ſet before us, make us CHRISTIANS invariably, as far as man, with unavoidable infirmities about him, can become ſo.

Now, this principle we appear to have in our holy Religion, for it is fundamentally eſſential to the true profeſſion of Chriſtianity, that every one that nameth the name of Chriſt ſhould depart from Iniquity.

The fitneſs of virtue is founded in truth, but it cannot operate as an univerſal principle, becauſe every man cannot be ſuppoſed, in many caſes, to ſee it. Nor is it ſo cogent, as it has only the imperfect underſtanding of men, however worthy, to enforce it.

The moral ſenſe is an imperfect rule to the majority, and chiefly animated by great acts of Benevolence, or of Cruelty and Injuſtice. It is, beſides, not actuated by human motives, by fears or hopes, by love or

gratitude; and it directs us not at once to the Fountain of good thoughts, words and works. Indeed, it rather leads us in general to juſt animadverſions upon the conduct of other men, than to uniform right action of our own.

The profeſſion of Chriſtianity in earneſt, has all the advantages, which would be ſought in vain, upon examining other ſyſtems. It extends to every affection and deſire of our hearts, and to every expreſſion of them in word or action. The purity of heart it requires is a ſure foundation for Innocence and Integrity of Life. The future ſtate of Rewards and Puniſhments, of which it aſſures us, overpowers all temptations, which are apt to ſhake the conſtancy and fortitude of a Chriſtian; and the inſtance it gives us of the ineſtimable goodneſs of God, is irreſiſtible, as a motive to gratitude, in the ſtrongeſt mind that contemplates it, in the great hour of diſtreſs.

The

The deſign of our Religion, with reſpect to this life, is, that we ſhould be patient, meek, and merciful—reſigned to God, and juſt and benevolent to man, in order to qualify us for higher perfection; that we ſhould ſet our affections on things above, and be ſo far at leaſt alienated from the objects before us, as not to do wrong, either for the attainment, or in the enjoyment, of them. It is a revelation from heaven, intended to bring us thither, by the ſure way of rendering ourſelves acceptable there; and to point out that way, by impreſſing upon us a variety of conſiſtent precepts of holineſs and virtue. It is too clear a law to be miſconſtrued in its moral precepts; for neither the ſpirit nor the letter of it will countenance any thing that tends to debaſe a character, that looks up to a bleſſed hope, which the world cannot give, and which no other ſyſtem of morals or religion has ever authentically offered.

It was atteſted, indeed, by Miracles; but they were not its only evidences. The ſwift propagation of it, was conſiderably aſſiſted by its intrinſic merits. Virtuous minds embraced it eagerly, and complied with the terms. When the name of a Chriſtian became reputable, it was of courſe aſſumed by other men, who wanted a good name. Theſe were the firſt and moſt dangerous heretics.

The Apoſtles, whoſe writings we have, guarded early againſt ſo obvious an abuſe, by intimations, that it is not merely a party deſcription; that the only cauſe, to which it can be fairly applied, is that of piety and radical virtue, of holineſs and univerſal benevolence. This is ſo clear, that if, by calling a man a Chriſtian, we only mean, that he is not a Jew or an Unbeliever, this negative character commands no confidence, and inſpires no particular veneration for his worth. But when we call him a TRUE Chriſtian,

That

That conveys an idea of ſomething reſpectable, of a character above the vanities and wild purſuits of mankind, formed and governed by a law, which penetrates into our hearts, and regulates our life and converſation, by the divine example of Him, who lived and died a perfect character.

Taking for granted, then, upon the authority of the whole New Teſtament, and of common ſenſe, that a ſincere profeſſor of Chriſtianity will be as far as poſſible uniformly virtuous and good, under all temptations and trials, one plain concluſion offers itſelf—that we cannot be too tenacious of the principles which conſtitute this excellent religion. They will always be undervalued, for reaſons of various kinds. We have reaſons, beſides their truth, to hold them faſt, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, without wavering. They muſt, if they have their full force, render us, and the world about us, conſiſtently good.

Chriſtians

Chriſtians have, therefore, an intereſt in keeping them preſent to their own minds, and are bound to tranſmit them to poſterity by ſuch means as the Religion of Chriſt will warrant. Every generation of men is intruſted with the religion and morals of ſucceeding generations. We often hear it ſaid, with truth, that we are obliged, as far as we can, to tranſmit to future ages the temporal bleſſings we enjoy. This is not always in our power, but we might with more proſpect of ſucceſs take care, that the principles which lead to uniform virtue, deſcend to the next generation. Our own example would go far towards this higheſt exerciſe of public ſpirit; but before we are capable of thus becoming exemplary Chriſtians, and arriving at this ſummit of human glory, it is neceſſary we ſhould conſider well, and often, the Religion we profeſs; not that we may place it in nice diſtinctions, and ingenious deductions of refined reaſoning, but that,

that, inſtead of placing it merely in a name, we may ſee, and feel, and poſſeſs, the great truths, which inforce that piety and integrity of character, ſo vital to Chriſtian Religion, and ſo beneficial to any community.

The name of Chriſt may be profaned by groſs impieties of various ſorts. But theſe are too contemptible to make a laſting impreſſion. Indeed, they are become too trite and abſurd for the entertainment of a ſenſible age.

It is a more effectual and more durable profanation or proſtitution of it, to pretend to be Chriſtians, and commit iniquity, as if virtue and our religion were ſeparable things. If they were, religion would ſoon be of very little general uſe. If it be only a name, the world can ſpare it, for a ſociety of inconſiſtent Chriſtians would differ only in name from a ſociety of conſiſtent Unbelievers.

Whereas practical religion illuſtrates, vindicates,

dicates, and propagates the doctrine and precepts, from which it proceeds. It flows ſo naturally from them, that a good Chriſtian is ſaid to ſhew his Faith by his Works. He ſhews, at the ſame time, that it is his perſuaſion, and how excellent a perſuaſion it is. In order to this great end, we muſt ſurmount the prejudices, the cuſtoms, the abſurdities, that beſet us in every part of life, and tend to make us inconſiſtent Chriſtians.

If, for inſtance, that perpetual round of vain pleaſures, which hinder us from a moment's thought about the great concern of human life, be ſeriouſly conſidered, as abſolutely neceſſary towards happineſs, God knows we ſhall not be true Chriſtians, though we name the name of Chriſt ever ſo often. We may be agreeable, and, perhaps, inoffenſive, within a certain ſphere of our own. But the great virtues, which dignify human nature,

nature, and exalt it into a worthy and an exemplary character, will not result from diſſipation; they are the fruit of ſober reflection upon the will of God, and determined reſolution to obey it.

Some of the truths relating to religion and morals, are ſo very clear, that they will gain admiſſion into a fair mind, if they are only ſuffered to preſent themſelves. The truth before us, is one of theſe. No man doubts, that a life uniformly good, is indiſpenſably neceſſary in a Chriſtian. But if we obſerve the lives of many Chriſtians, it ſhould ſeem, as if this clear and obvious truth had not been properly introduced into their minds. Yet this is not the caſe, for our Apoſtle in my text propoſes it, with a noble and ſtriking ſimplicity, ſuch as is apt to impreſs the wiſe aphoriſms of antiquity. The whole of Chriſtian practice, and its connection with the great principles of our religion, are laid before

before us in one ſhort, intelligible, and memorable precept—Let every one, that nameth the name of Chriſt, depart from iniquity.

SERMON VIII.

MATT. V. 1, 2.

AND SEEING THE MULTITUDES, HE WENT UP INTO A MOUNTAIN, AND WHEN HE WAS SET, HIS DISCIPLES CAME UNTO HIM; AND HE OPENED HIS MOUTH AND TAUGHT THEM.

WITH theſe words the ſacred hiſtorian introduces that admirable collection of precepts delivered by our Lord, very early in his miniſtry, and diſtinguiſhed among us by the name of the Sermon on the Mount. The fame of him had gone about throughout all Syria, and the people followed him from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jeruſalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan. At the head of his followers are mentioned his Diſciples, the firſt inſtruments of propagating his Goſpel, to whom ſome of theſe directions are peculiarly addreſſed: the

the greater part of his audience conſiſted of a promiſcuous number of people who wanted inſtruction, and by obtaining it, might be converted themſelves, and become qualified to convert others.

The precepts flowed from a moſt ſublime mind, and were delivered by him, who was ſaid to have ſpoken as never man ſpake, and to have had an object in ſpeaking, more beneficial and extenſive, than ever man had—the perfection and happineſs of all mankind.

He teaches them Virtues, of which they knew but little, and lays a ſtreſs upon Duties, which had probably not occurred to moſt of them. Humility, meekneſs, patience, diſintereſtedneſs in worldly matters, ſolicitude about the kingdom of God—ſo keen a ſolicitude, that he deſcribes it by the urgent appetites of hunger and thirſt. He recommends a merciful, placable, and pacific temper; conſiſtency and conſtancy in their profeſſion

profeſſion of Him; candour and charity in their judgment of one another; juſtice to all mankind, by the rule of their own expectation of juſtice from the world; ſincerity and purity of heart in their religious and ſocial conduct; and upon the whole a perfection, as far as poſſible, like that of their Father in heaven.

Theſe ſeveral virtues and duties were, in the courſe of his miniſtry, illuſtrated by parables, and frequently inculcated. They were the features, by which his followers were to be known; and as the aſſemblage of them was to form as complete and amiable a character as poſſible, we may be uſefully employed in conſidering the tendency of ſuch a character, as is here preſcribed, and the actual effect of it in the propagation of the Goſpel.

Chriſtian faith and practice are repreſented by St. Paul, under the word Godlineſs, as profitable unto all things, having the pro-

miſe of the life that now is, and that which is to come. Theſe promiſes are the comforts of a Chriſtian courſe. The good Chriſtian, who relies on them, feels the bleſſednefs of them here, before he enters on the conſummation of them hereafter. But the leſſons laid down on the preſent occaſion, have a farther tendency to qualify a Chriſtian to communicate the knowledge and the hopes he enjoys, and ſo to impreſs the glad tidings he has heard, on the hearts and minds of others.

In order to do this, he muſt win their attention, their eſteem, and their hearts; and nothing could be more aptly fitted to the purpoſe, than the meeknefs, humility, charity, and purity here inculcated.

The age was extremely ignorant in matters of religion, and diſſolute in morals. The great parties in the Jewiſh church were chiefly either hypocrites or libertines; and in the heathen world there were indeed ſyſtems

tems of ethics, but they were little known out of the ſchools. Such characters, therefore, as could invite attention, were the beſt qualified to reform the world by introducing the Goſpel. Our bleſſed Lord's character was, doubtleſs, of that ſort in a ſupreme degree; and he invites his diſciples to learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart, which was diſſuading them from the moſt diſguſting vices and follies, and adviſing them to get poſſeſſion of the moſt amiable virtues of Chriſtianity.

A pure character appearing in ſuch a world, would firſt gain attention by its rarity, and then reverence by its ſingular excellence. An evil generation, like that in which John the Baptiſt diſtinguiſhed himſelf, would have revolted at his proclamation of Repentance, if the ſingularity of his virtues had not been obſerved and revered. Even Herod, the Tetrarch, a notorious ſinner, bore teſtimony to his worth.

So the Diſciples of Chriſt, who were to oppoſe the opinions and manners of the world, were to begin with raiſing the attention, and acquiring the eſteem and good-will, of mankind; and a character eminently good has the beſt chance for attention even in a profligate age; for a preference of good to evil, where the underſtanding decides, will always be unavoidable. So that the good character muſt in general eſtimation be the ſuperior, and reſpected acccordingly among men in other points equal.

If to this natural veneration of virtue be added the good-will excited, and the affections conciliated, by ſome of the virtues and graces here bleſſed and preſcribed, their tendency towards a favourable reception will be indiſputable.

To be perfectly inoffenſive, goes far towards eſteem; but meekneſs, humility, patience, charity, and purity of heart are poſitive and ſtriking excellencies. They have a claim

a claim to attention in general, and to unreſerved credit, when they are the inſtruments of bringing forward a matter of infinite conſequence.

Nor are they in themſelves objects of envy or malice. When they are perſecuted, it is becauſe bad men are blind or indifferent to moral beauty; for wherever theſe are found really to exiſt, they muſt be favoured by human beings.

A prepoſſeſſion in favour of the matter propoſed, or of the perſons propoſing it, will generally give full effect to the arts of eloquence. But in this caſe, mere attention almoſt inſured ſucceſs; for the truths which were offered to the underſtandings of men, correſponded ſo entirely with the virtuous habits which were to diſtinguiſh the profeſſors of thoſe truths, that there can be no doubt about the direct tendency of theſe to introduce with ſucceſs the doctrine of ſalvation.

If we next conſider, what was the effect, when men ſo accompliſhed, ſo thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works, entered upon the great undertaking of changing the hearts and minds of mankind, reſiſting the world, the fleſh and the devil, and bringing the ſons of Adam to God their Father, and Jeſus Chriſt their Redeemer; we ſhall find this tendency, of our Lord's precepts, illuſtrated by a known ſeries of facts, by a moſt ſplendid ſucceſs for three centuries; during which the Chriſtian faith was embraced by perſons of all ranks and deſcriptions, by princes and ſubjects, by philoſophers and armies, by perſons who came prepared with a good life, and others who ſincerely repented of a bad one; till at length the head of the Roman empire, received Chriſtianity as the Religion of that great part of the known world.

If we ſuppoſe only a conſiderable number of thoſe multitudes, who were converted by the

the firſt preaching of the Apoſtles, and by their miraculous powers, to have been real and laſting converts, the immediate effect muſt have been very great. All ſuch, whoſe converſion was more than a temporary, ſhort-lived impulſe, muſt have diſſeminated the Goſpel truths, by communicating to others what they heard and had felt. Deep as the follies and vanities of the world may appear to be rooted, they would be checked in their growth, if not blaſted, by the natural force of irreſiſtible truth, delivered by pure and diſintereſted men, ſupported as theſe were by miraculous powers.

It has been ſaid, with an apparent view to the diſcredit of theſe converts, that many of them were grievous ſinners. Nothing could be affirmed more to the honour of their converters. Our bleſſed Lord came to ſave ſuch characters; the ſalvation of ſinners was the object of his Goſpel, of his coming into the world, of his life and death. But

it was eſſential to their converſion, and the condition of their ſalvation, that they ſhould renounce their ſins. Some might, and actually did, bring infirmities and prejudices with them; for they did not ceaſe to be men, in becoming Chriſtians; but as the Goſpel did, notwithſtanding, ſpread far and wide, after miraculous powers were withdrawn, and as there was a manifeſt tendency to this, in the lives and characters of the primitive Chriſtians, the effect was moſt probably in great meaſure produced by them. Early writers ſpeak of their perfection, for ſome ages, in a very high ſtrain. Perfection in man is a relative term, and muſt be meaſured by his capacity. The firſt age was moſt likely to abound with the beſt characters; and, as is the caſe with every thing in the hands of men, our religion might in time ſuffer by being mixed with human infirmities; but its nature being permanent, its progreſs was not retarded.

When

When a Roman governor, at a diſtance of time from the firſt planting of the Goſpel, had inquired into the character of the Chriſtians in his province, he candidly reported to his maſter, that they were quite inoffenſive to the ſtate, kindly affectioned to one another, and zealous in their devotion to God. Here was character ſufficient to recommend them, and to increaſe their numbers, long after thoſe prodigies of piety and virtue, which announced and adorned the Goſpel in the firſt part of the Chriſtian hiſtory.

So that the impreſſion, originally made by the Apoſtles, continued to operate upon the minds and lives of their ſucceſſors, and prevailed over the errors and impieties of the the world for many ſucceeding generations. Chriſtians were known by their virtues and ſufferings. Their religion ſimply propoſed, was received upon their teſtimony, as a better and more authentic religion, than any other;

other; as teaching men to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly and godly in this preſent world, looking for the bleſſed hope of immortality, promiſed to his Diſciples and followers by the divine founder of it.

It muſt be confeſſed, and is not matter of wonder, that as the Chriſtians, who had made ſo great a progreſs, were ſtill no more than men, proſperity had an effect upon them, to which they were ſtrangers in the days of their troubles and perſecutions.

The various objects of ambition captivated ſome; others relaxed their zeal, or gave it a wrong direction; ſome appeared to forget their divine Maſter, when in the heat of diſputation they laid aſide the meekneſs, humility, and patience, which became them ſo well, and had contributed ſo largely to bring them into notice.

But notwithſtanding the darkneſs and corruption, which might be expected to follow upon

upon a decay of Chriſtian piety, there remained a ſufficient number of faithful men to preſerve both the letter and ſpirit of the Goſpel—till the happy period of its revival, which reſtored to their original purity the divine truths, and the precepts, with which it was the wiſdom of our bleſſed Redeemer to introduce them.

From what hath been ſaid, of the tendency and the effect of the rules of Chriſtian life, propoſed in the Sermon on the Mount, we may gather—

Firſt, that the human means of the early propagation of the Goſpel, however complex they may be rendered by connecting them with remote and incidental things, are ſufficiently traced out in the lives of the primitive Chriſtians, which lead more directly and naturally to the effect, than any other cauſe.

Secondly. As the connection between real piety and Goſpel truths is apparent, from the effect

effect it had in introducing them to the world, and as the divine Revealer of thofe truths, was likewife the teacher of every Chriftian duty, it is the moft ungrateful of all herefy, to feparate what Chrift hath joined together, by pretending that a good moral character is a recommendation to him, without faith in his merits, and truft in his promifes.

In the laft place, as our Religion has not all its due effect, unlefs it be exemplary, every Chriftian is bound, in gratitude to God, in good will to his fellow-creatures, and upon the motive of that perfonal intereft all men have in Chriftianity, to form his mind for the fincere profeffion of it, by a fuitable life and converfation.

Chriftianity is, doubtlefs, to us all, the moft valuable bleffing of heaven. It brings us the mercy we all ftand in need of—forgivenefs of our fins, upon a condition, without which no man can be truly happy, a holy

holy and virtuous life; and this is, at the ſame time, the only means we are acquainted with, of pleaſing God; comprehends every good office and kind affection to our neighbour; and promiſes to ourſelves a comfort at the laſt, greater than any of the ſons of men ever derived from their pleaſures, their poſſeſſions, or their proſpects, in this world. If this be, as it certainly is, indiſputable, away with thoſe pleaſures, poſſeſſions, and proſpects; and let every believer in Chriſt Jeſus graft the Sermon on the Mount inwardly in his heart, there to bring forth the fruit of good living.

SERMON IX.

ON THE LITURGY OF OUR CHURCH.

[*Preached on St. Mark's Day*, 1763, *pursuant to the Will of Mr. John Hutchins.*]

PSALM XXIX. 2.

GIVE UNTO THE LORD THE GLORY DUE UNTO HIS NAME; WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS.

THE worſhip of God is ſo natural a duty, that the practice of it has extended as far in the world, as the knowledge of HIM; and it has been more or leſs perfect, in proportion to the degrees of men's knowledge of God and his attributes. This is the obvious account of the various modes of worſhip practiſed by different nations; but, beſides this, ſome diverſity would naturally ariſe in each nation, from the different underſtandings of men, as well as from their various

various diſpoſitions of mind; and thus, conſiderations of a foreign nature would of courſe intermix in a matter, in which all men are concerned, and which good men have ſo much at heart.

One nation having been ſelected by God, to keep up the knowledge of him in the world, and to produce in time the great Revealer of the Divine Will to all mankind, it appears to have been the particular object of Providence, that their worſhip ſhould be uniform, and that it ſhould ſerve the important purpoſe of keeping them unpolluted by the idolatries of their neighbours. Accordingly, many circumſtances of the Jewiſh worſhip had a tendency, ſo to fix their attention, that the groſs errors and practices of their neighbours might not divert it; whilſt many other circumſtances were evidently intended to ſignify thoſe humble and grateful ſentiments, which poſſeſs a pious mind in the preſence of God.

When

When the fulneſs of time was come, to realize all that was typified, and to accompliſh what was foretold, in the Jewiſh Church, the terms of acceptance with God were proportioned to the extenſive deſign of the Goſpel.

The Jewiſh worſhip, of which the beauty chiefly conſiſted in its conformity to the divine inſtitution of it, was of itſelf ſuperſeded by a religion, deſigned by the great object of worſhip, not for one nation, but for all the ends of the earth. So much of it, as had a reference to the idolatries of nations contiguous to Paleſtine, was too local for an univerſal religion; and ſo much as had been graciouſly adapted, by the divine inſtitutor, to the inveterate prejudices of the Jews, or to other circumſtances peculiar to their condition, became uſeleſs in a religion, which was meant to open the door of mercy to Gentiles as well as Jews.

But after all theſe deductions, it would be

be abſurd to ſuppoſe, that a public worſhip was not intended under the Goſpel, though our Saviour appears, by his ſilence, to have left the form of it to be ſettled, according to the different exigencies of the ſeveral branches of his Church.

He himſelf conformed to the Jewiſh worſhip, and frequented the Synagogues and the Temple at Jeruſalem. But, as he foreſaw the deſtruction of that Temple, and the overthrow of the Jewiſh State, it may be preſumed, that he would have ſignified his will to his diſciples, had he meant to have the typical parts of the Jewiſh ſervice retained, after they were accompliſhed in his perſon; or had he meant to have any particular forms and ceremonies ſubſtituted in their room, for the uſe of all ages.

But he did not leave his Church without the moſt eſſential directions. His inſtitution of thoſe two ſignificant rites, which we call Sacraments, and the general Form of

Prayer he prefcribed, ſufficiently intimated his will, that Divine Worſhip ſhould be an indiſpenſible part of Chriſtian duty; and they were at the ſame time ſtrong intimations of the SIMPLICITY, which, according to the genius of his Religion, was to be the principal ingredient in the Chriſtian Beauty of Holineſs.

That his prayer was a model for Chriſtian prayer in general, not a form intended to exclude all other forms of prayer, is ſo evident from his own conduct, as well as from ſome Apoſtolical directions, that it ſeems to require no other proof. But whether any other ſet form for public worſhip, was uſed in the early infancy of his Church, is not ſo perfectly clear.

We know, that the worſhip in the Jewiſh Synagogue conſiſted, eſpecially after their return from Babylon, partly of forms of prayer. It ſeems very probable, that the Apoſtles would retain ſuch, as were not inconſiſtent

conſiſtent with the purity of the Goſpel; or at leaſt, that they would continue the uſe of public forms of prayer, as no leſs proper in the Chriſtian, than in the Jewiſh Church.

But how far they carried the practice, is not an inquiry neceſſary to juſtify the preſent eſtabliſhment of it; ſince it derogates neither from the utility, nor the authority of public forms, to ſuppoſe the Apoſtles and their immediate ſucceſſors to have been inſpired, when they delivered themſelves either in prayer or exhortation; and to ſuppoſe the people, at leaſt the truly pious part of them, to have had extraordinary aſſiſtances from Heaven, in joining devoutly in a prayer, with which they were before unacquainted. Their example being a rule to us, in thoſe inſtances only in which it is imitable, could not be an invariable rule in this inſtance, after their powers were withdrawn, and when the whole was left to the ordinary powers of human underſtanding.

At whatever period this happened, Chriſtians muſt ſoon have perceived, how inſufficient, for the ends of public prayer, extemporary effuſions were; and how much the proper devotion of mind was diminiſhed, by the attention neceſſary, to apprehend the meaning of him, who was the leader in prayer, to collect the force of his words, and to follow him to the end of his period, where ſometimes the principal word lyes, which determines the ſenſe of the reſt.

This inconvenience muſt neceſſarily have ariſen from the public uninſpired uſe of extemporary, or, as ſome call it, free prayer; and if the Miniſter chanced, as might happen in any century after the firſt, to want piety, or judgment, or the people to need ſomething to fix their attention, and excite their devotion, the inconvenience then became a conſiderable evil.

To remove and prevent it, Liturgies were drawn up in different forms, by the Governors

nors of different Churches, till the Church of Rome gave law to the whole Chriſtian world, and preſcribed one ſet of forms for all nations. What ſort of forms they were, how unintelligible to great part of the Chriſtian world, how foreign to the Simplicity of the Goſpel, what a number of mediators they erected, inſtead of the Only Mediator between God and man, and how they made the Commandment of Chriſt of none effect, by a variety of human traditions, is ſufficiently known amongſt us.

When the corruptions of the Romiſh Church were arrived at their criſis, and Providence raiſed up the great men, who reſiſted the unchriſtian laws of an unchriſtian tyrant, it was the happineſs of our National Church to be furniſhed with pious and judicious men, who compiled a Liturgy, with an apparent deſire to unite all Proteſtants, of this nation at leaſt, in one intelligible form of worſhip.

But it happened unfortunately, that the Proteſtant Church abroad was early divided; and the diviſion was imported hither, by ſome of the great men, who had been obliged to fly from a perſecuting reign, in which our Proteſtantiſm narrowly eſcaped deſtruction in its infancy.

The hiſtory of this diviſion is not eaſily related with a ſtrict impartiality; and ſo far as it leads to reproach either ſide, it is better not revived. But without minutely repeating former grievances, we may and ought to regret, that things Indifferent were ever treated as if they had been Eſſential; that the Eſtabliſhment of indifferent things was not conſidered, as a reaſon for acquieſcing in them; and that the breach of Chriſtian charity, which ſeldom fails to attend a Separation more or leſs, did not deter men from ſeparating, without extreme neceſſity.

However, a ſeparation took place, and was partly founded in objections to the eſtabliſhed

eſtabliſhed Liturgy. That it is not a perfect compilation, may be confeſſed, without diſreſpect to it. If it be more perfect, than any form of worſhip, uſed by the perſons or parties who cenſure it, then it is ſufficiently defended againſt Them; and if it anſwer all the valuable ends of public worſhip, our Governors in Church and State are not chargeable with a neglect of the cauſe of Religion, in delaying a reformation of the Liturgy, till a proper ſeaſon, of which they muſt be the judges.

We have reaſon, in the mean time, to thank God for our Book of Common Prayer, upon comparing it with that, for which it was exchanged. A farther reformation might comprehend more Proteſtants; and it might be the means of loſing many of the preſent Members of our Church. A wiſe Government will conſider well, in ſo ſerious a matter, before it makes the hazardous experiment, whether the benefit would outweigh the loſs?

But it is our comfort, that the imperfections are neither ſo many, nor ſo great, as to exclude the BEAUTY of HOLINESS, which, under the Goſpel, may be ſaid to conſiſt in a Worſhip, RATIONAL and DECENT with reſpect to the form, and SINCERE in the act. And what is there in our Liturgy that is irrational and indecent, or that is inconſiſtent with a ſincere worſhip of God?

Is it irrational to confeſs our ſins; to implore the Divine pardon; to pray for graces of which we feel the want, and which God has promiſed upon our prayer to ſupply; to intercede for all men; and to give humble and hearty thanks to our Heavenly Father? Indeed it is not pretended by Chriſtians of any denomination, that theſe ſeveral acts of worſhip interfere with the trueſt notions we have of God and of our relation to him.

Is it then the Form, in which theſe Prayers and Thankſgivings are preſcribed in our Liturgy, that contradicts any principles of right reaſon?

reaſon? No one will aſſert this, who has exerciſed his intellectual faculties in acts of piety. He will find the words in general correſponding to his own deſires; he will feel the benefit of expreſſing different deſires in diſtinct prayers, of keeping devotion erect and attentive by a judicious variety, and of intermixing parts of Scripture and ejaculations, worthy of the moſt rational mind, with the prayers, which expreſs the pureſt devotion of the heart. All this is ſo neceſſary an aid to the greateſt underſtanding, when directed to God, that it is highly probable, the moſt perfect reaſoner would, with the Scriptures before him, contrive a form of prayer very ſimilar to this, if it had never exiſted.

For here is nothing ſuperſtitious, unleſs the belief of God and Jeſus Chriſt be ſuperſtition. Here is no prayer for a bleſſing which we do not really need; nor any acknowledgment of a mercy which we have

not

not really received. The language is not below the ſentiments of a rational being in the act of prayer, nor is it ſtrained beyond the natural extent of the thoughts of ſuch a being, addreſſing his Creator. Enthuſiaſts complain, that it is cold and lifeleſs; whilſt men in the other extreme repreſent it, as having a tendency to enthuſiaſm. It ſhould ſeem, from theſe oppoſite complaints, that a due medium had been obſerved between the two extremes. Some parts are animated, and the conſtitution of man requires that they ſhould be ſo. If it were abſolute enthuſiaſm to lift up the heart of man to God, it would follow, that the perfection of a reaſonable being conſiſted in his diſtance from God; the contrary of which is true. But both the charges are obviated by a trial of theſe forms of prayer. They will not appear dull to a well-diſpoſed mind; and they will not appear enthuſiaſtical to ſuch a mind, when it experiences,

that

that the affections here raiſed, are founded in ſome great truth, and tend to the practice of ſome great duty.

In the next place, is there any thing indecent in the form of worſhip preſcribed in our Liturgy? Will the candid Papiſt deny, that it ſuits the condition of man with reſpect to God, and that it is adapted to the condition of whole congregations united in the act of worſhip? Will a candid Fellow Proteſtant affirm, that any part of it tends to idolatry, as ſome parts of the Romiſh worſhip do? Candid men of all perſuaſions will confeſs the truth, and therefore the ſubſtance of our Liturgy has nothing to fear from their examination. Superfluities and irreverence are both apt to ſhelter themſelves under the word *Decency*; but both are as carefully avoided, as the times would permit, when this form was compiled; and are not complained of now, by the moſt devout worſhippers in our Church.

When

When man preſents himſelf before God in private, his ſenſe of God, and of his own dependence and obligations, together with his offences, will impreſs his mind with a reverential awe, which, like other ſentiments of the mind, will almoſt involuntarily be accompanied with a ſuitable poſture of body. When whole congregations preſent themſelves, the ſame reaſons ſubſiſting, or being ſuppoſed to ſubſiſt, the ſame poſture is properly preſcribed to them, for the benefit of each individual, as well as for the mutual benefit of example. Theſe reaſons for preſcribing the outward act, which is moſt expreſſive of the ſuppoſed ſtate of the mind, are ſupported by the higheſt authorities; kneeling having been the poſture of prayer in the Jewiſh, and in the earlieſt days of the Chriſtian Church.

To keep the prayers true to their Proper Object, the fopperies of Rome are diſcarded from our Church, and her Miniſters aſſume

no

no ſuch authoritative powers to themſelves, as might divert the devotion of the people from its Proper Object to them. The objections, which have been made to the poſture of kneeling at the Sacrament, cannot juſtly be made now, when there is hardly a member of our Church, who believes the elements to be objects of worſhip, or who believes them to be any thing more in themſelves, than they were before conſecration.

The ſame regard to decency runs through the form of our prayers. God is addreſſed in words becoming our conceptions of his greatneſs, and the knowledge we have, or ought to have, of our dependence and unworthineſs. The form of confeſſion is as humble, as becomes ſelf-convicted ſinners, who apply to their judge for Mercy. The prayers for temporal bleſſings are few and general, and very conſiſtent with an entire ſubmiſſion to the will and providence of God. The prayers for ſpiritual bleſſings are many

and

and various; as ſhort as our Saviour directs our prayers to be, and as numerous as the wants, of which we ought to be ſenſible, and for the relief of which we are commanded to pray. The appeal to the merits and mediation of Chriſt, which concludes every prayer, implies an humble and decent confeſſion, that we cannot truſt for ſucceſs to our own merits.

If then the Prayers themſelves, the Diſpoſition of them, and the Manner in which they are directed to be offered up, concur to form a Worſhip becoming ſuch a creature as man, towards his Creator, Governor, and Judge, ſurely we do not exaggerate in the praiſe of our Liturgy, when we attribute to it the merit of conducing to a DECENT worſhip.

In the laſt place, is the Book of Common Prayer ſuited to a SINCERE worſhip? Is there any thing in the prayers, which doth not correſpond to the purity of heart of the beſt Chriſtian,

Chriſtian, and which he may not pronounce as words, flowing from his own ſentiments? Are not the bleſſings he prays for, the very bleſſings he wiſhes and needs? Is he not in the ſight of God that miſerable ſinner, which he profeſſes himſelf to be? Has he not received the mercies, for which he is here returning thanks? What is there then, in which a ſincere worſhipper of God may not join, or which does not come up to the devout thoughts of his own mind in the worſhip of God? Theſe queſtions may be aſked the more confidently, becauſe there are few of our diſſenting Fellow Proteſtants, who do not ſometimes join in theſe forms. If they cannot offer up ſuch prayers ſincerely, they would not join in them at all; for we have no more right to charge them, than they have to charge us, with honouring God with the lips, when the heart is far from him.

If, then, our Liturgy be, upon the whole,

a proper

a proper form of worſhip for a rational and ſinful creature to offer to the great and perfect God; and if it be expreſſive of all the ſincerity of devotion, to which the beſt Chriſtian can pretend, let us not be moved, by here and there an imperfection, to think lightly of ſo great an inſtrument of true piety, which has aſſiſted many, and will, even whilſt it continues unreformed, aſſiſt many more good Chriſtians, in their way to Heaven.

It is in other caſes much eaſier to cenſure a great work, than to execute it; and it may be truly ſaid of a Form of Public Prayer, that it is one of the moſt difficult human compoſitions. A knowledge of Scripture and of Chriſtian antiquity, are indeed conſiderable requiſites; but the moſt fundamental are, a large meaſure of true Piety, and a very ſuperior Judgment. Without both theſe qualifications, the prayer produced will be very lifeleſs; it will betray the

the incapacity of the compoſer, and it will neither excite, nor aſſiſt, devotion in the reader.

Scripture indeed is an inexhauſtible fund for the language of prayer; but Scripture in the hands of a man without real piety, will be as inſufficient to produce a good prayer, as the beſt inſtrument will be in unſkilful hands, to produce a work of art. If the pious deſire, to which the ſcriptural phraſe ſhould correſpond, exiſts not in the heart of the compoſer, Scripture will be applied by him indiſcriminately; and if at the ſame time he be deficient in judgment, he will make uſe of ſcriptural phraſes, which are not adapted to the language of prayer; and his own expreſſions will be at a diſtance from the proper medium, either too lofty, or too low; either too general, or too particular: the latter of which is more commonly the error of an injudicious man, than the former.

The compilers of our Liturgy laboured under none of this incapacity. They are remarkably happy in the uſe of ſcripture language, and ſurprizingly judicious in compiling a Form of Prayers, which, at ſo great a diſtance of time, and under ſome change of language and manners, ſtill ſuits the condition of all the Chriſtians, who uſe it, and enables them to preſent themſelves before God, we hope acceptably, on every occaſion of public, and on many occaſions of private, worſhip.

I cannot better recapitulate and inforce what hath been ſaid, than in the words of a Prelate, who was, throughout his long life, an illuſtrious ornament to this Proteſtant Church, and argued moſt unanſwerably for the *reaſonableneſs of conformity* to it; I mean the late excellent Biſhop Hoadly, in whoſe *Perſuaſive to Lay-conformity* we find the following paſſage on the Liturgy:

" There is nothing in this ſervice inde-

" cent;

" cent; nothing unſuitable to the Majeſty
" of Him who receives it, or unbecom-
" ing the worſhippers who offer it. It is
" compoſed of Confeſſions; of Praiſes and
" Thankſgivings; of Prayers and Interceſ-
" ſions; and theſe very well adapted to the
" conditions, and obligations, and neceſſities
" of the generality of Chriſtians. And what
" could you wiſh for more in a *Public Ser-*
" *vice?* Or, where can you go, where you
" can be certain of ſo good and ſo proper
" aſſiſtances? If you ſay, you have been
" preſent at this Service, and find little en-
" tertainment in it; that it is dry and jejune,
" unapt to move your affections, and raiſe
" your devotions; conſider, whence this muſt
" have proceeded? Have you come to it
" with a hearty good will, and a ſincere de-
" ſire of reliſhing it? Have you thrown
" out of your minds all prejudices, and en-
" deavoured to cure all that indifference to
" it, which a long diſuſe may have cauſed?

" Have you attended to it with application " and ſerioufneſs? And, above all, have " you prepared your hearts before-hand, " and endeavoured to furniſh them with " ſuch thoughts, and ſuch affections, as are " proper to be expreſſed in all the ſeveral " parts of *Public Worſhip?* This is the main " point of all: and whoever hath conſcien- " tiouſly done this, I am perſuaded, will " not lightly ſpeak evil of the *eſtabliſhed* " *Liturgy.*"

SERMON X.

MATTHEW VI. 6.

BUT THOU, WHEN THOU PRAYEST, ENTER INTO THY CLOSET, AND WHEN THOU HAST SHUT THY DOOR, PRAY TO THY FATHER, WHICH IS IN SECRET; AND THY FATHER, WHICH SEETH IN SECRET, SHALL REWARD THEE OPENLY.

IN conſidering theſe words, it will not be neceſſary to recite the arguments for Prayer in general. Our Lord here ſuppoſes it to be a Duty and a Practice. It muſt always have been a duty, for it ariſes from our intire, unqueſtionable dependance upon the infinite power, wiſdom and goodneſs of God; and it certainly was a practice among the Jews, who were his hearers. He, therefore, takes the obligation and the reaſonableneſs of it for granted, and only lays down ſome rules concerning it, of which the neceſſity appeared too evident.

In the verſe before us, he recommends Private Prayer, in oppoſition, not to the public worſhip of Almighty God, at ſtated times and places, but to the affected devotion of perſons, who pretended to offer up prayers, in the ſynagogues and corners of the ſtreets, that they might be ſeen of men.

The ſynagogues here meant were probably, according to the original ſignification of the word, places of public reſort, whether it were for buſineſs or curioſity; ſo at leaſt they ſeem to be here, being mentioned along with the corners of ſtreets, as places improper for devout prayer.

The Jewiſh ſynagogues, for religious inſtruction, were frequented by our Saviour himſelf and his Apoſtles; and Prayer was the eſtabliſhed uſage in them. They were of a very early date, and indiſpenſable to the ſupport of public religion, as the Temple at Jeruſalem was too diſtant from the greater part of the nation, to be conſtantly attended on

on the ſabbath. So that our Lord could not mean to diſcountenance thoſe inſtitutions.

Men might, indeed, be inattentive in any religious aſſemblies, for too many are ſo in our's; there might be hypocriſy too, in ſome frequenters of the ſynagogue, or of the Temple, for even Chriſtian churches are not quite exempt from that odious abuſe of religion; and if private prayer were perfectly free from ſuch evils, we might ſuppoſe, that all worſhip was, by this direction, confined to it.

But moſt of us are too ſenſible, that it is poſſible to pray, even in private, without due attention; and though public worſhip has been more perverted to the purpoſes of hypocriſy; yet the ſame abuſe may inſinuate itſelf into the practice of private piety, ſince looſe or deſigning men may aſſume that character, with a view either to confound the marks of true devotion, or to make the diſ-

guiſe of their own hearts more impenetrable.

What is it then, that is ſo circumſtantially recommended here? for if public worſhip be not condemned, the thing recommended under this deſcription of the duty, muſt be practicable both in the Congregation and in the Cloſet, though beſt deſcribed by prayer in the latter. It was, therefore, moſt probably the object of our Saviour to inculcate Purity and Sincerity, in divine worſhip in general.

The precept was delivered to a multitude, who followed him very early in his miniſtry, to hear what better things he had to propoſe, than their accuſtomed teachers.

There was at that time a powerful party in the Jewiſh Church, who were the leaders of public opinions, and, upon the Oſtentation of aſſumed Virtues, and the merit of a punctilious rigour in leſſer matters, claimed a reputation belonging to the higheſt worth.

This

This pretenſion of their's, our Lord thought it neceſſary, for the credit of true piety, to explode; and in order thereto, he ſets his followers right, with reſpect to the prayers, the alms, faſting, and other religious practices, with which theſe diſſemblers trafficked.

Here he reſcues the comfortable and inſtructive duty of prayer out of their hands; and as he was ſpeaking to a people, ſome of whom might in very few years become members of his infant Church, he thought fit thus to perpetuate the end and deſign, at that time ſo much forgotten, of a duty moſt intimately connected with Chriſtian Religion. With this view, he lays great ſtreſs upon a mode of devotion, as diſtant as poſſible from that which he cenſures.

It was eſſential to the prayer of a Phariſee, to be delivered in the ſight of men. His purpoſe would have been defeated, by entering into his cloſet, and ſhutting the door.

door. It was, beſides, the object of his prayer, to exalt himſelf in the opinion of thoſe, who ſaw and heard him.

We read of one, who went up into the Temple to pray. Moſt men would have been awed into a proper ſtate of mind, by the ſolemnity of the place. But he, inſtead of confeſſing the greatneſs of God, and his own unworthineſs to approach him there, could not forbear boaſting of his poor merits, in an addreſs to the Creator of the univerſe.

Now, what could ſuch vanity have done in retirement, in the abſence of all the world, with no other witneſs than the great Searcher of hearts?

It was our Lord's manner, in other inſtances, to teach by parables, and make uſe of the imagination of his hearers, to impreſs his doctrine upon their underſtandings. Here he preſents before them the idea of a duty, diſcharged in perfection, by repreſenting

ing a Diſciple of his in the act of it, and ſo contraſting that with the nullity and impiety of a Phariſee's prayer.

The obvious leſſon then, ariſing from the circumſtances before us of private prayer, is, that God being a Spirit, they who would worſhip him acceptably, muſt worſhip him in Spirit and in Truth. Whether it were on Mount Sion, or on Mount Gerizim, or wherever elſe public devotion was exerciſed, it was evidently ineffectual, unleſs it were offered with the Purity and Sincerity, ſuppoſed to attend private devotion.

After what hath been ſaid, to obviate a miſtake of the text, as if it were meant to diſcredit public worſhip, which is preſcribed throughout holy ſcripture, practiſed in all nations, and ſupported by all governments, as neceſſary to the well-being of mankind in ſociety; it muſt be admitted, that there are ſome advantages to individuals in private prayer, upon which we are here

authoriſed

authoriſed to recommend it, eſpecially as it leads at the ſame time to the right uſe of public prayer.

The mind of man, when withdrawn from the external impediments to devotion, is, doubtleſs, more fully in poſſeſſion of itſelf, in order to give a free ſcope to ſuch pious thoughts, as it is capable of, in contemplating and adoring our Almighty Creator and Governor. I ſay, ſuch thoughts as the human mind is capable of; for if Scripture had not happily pointed out the limits of the meditation, by applying it to our amendment and comfort, and provided both matter and language to aſſiſt it, man could not upon the ſtrength of his own faculties purſue it far. He would be loſt in the immenſity of the object. The wildneſs and diſtraction of enthuſiaſm would of courſe take place.

But Scripture, whilſt it provides a copious fund of materials for prayer, in the perfections of God, gives us the hiſtory of them,

as

as acting upon the viſible creation, and particularly upon his rational creatures. What the Almighty doth in worlds unknown, cannot be diſcovered by us. It is ſufficient to lift up our ſouls to Him, that he ſupports that part of his creation, which we know, and every individual may ſee and feel, that he is our God.

Our thoughts and affections, thus withdrawn from their uſual objects, and ſet on things above, cannot well return home to us, without impreſſing upon our minds a ſenſe of our dependance. But here the ſpirit of prayer finds an obſtacle in the ſins, which ſeparate between God and his creature. We have indeed a gracious promiſe of relief from that burthen, but we are left in ſome meaſure to lighten it ourſelves, by Confeſſion and Amendment.

Now, public confeſſion muſt be general, as it cannot comprehend the caſe of individuals. Private prayer is at liberty to enter into

into particulars, and immediate comfort ariſes from diſburthening our minds, and laying all our ſins before Him, who promiſes Reſt to the Penitent, weary and heavy laden.

Sometimes a ſenſe of guilt is providentially heightened by a ſenſe of ſuffering; and in that caſe, happy the penitent who turns his thoughts to Devotion at any time; but probably moſt happy he, who can withdraw from other objects, and pour out his ſoul before God.

When Peter went out, and wept bitterly, the ſenſe of ſhame might drive him from the preſence of his divine Maſter; but he had heard ſo much good from him, during his faithful attachment, that he might alſo retire in haſte from the ſight of men, to lament his infirmity in ſolitude, and ſeek, by Anxious Prayer, the ſupernatural relief he wanted in his extreme diſtreſs.

We may obſerve, with the moſt profound reverence for the divine perfection of our bleſſed

bleſſed Lord, that he, who had not a fault to confeſs, retired to private piety in the agony of his ſoul, when he ſaid, "O my "Father, if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs "from me;" and as he made every act of his, to the laſt moment of his life, inſtructive, he pointed out the immediate relief ariſing from devout prayer, when he ſeemed to recollect, and did reſign himſelf, in thoſe exemplary words, "Nevertheleſs, not as I "will, but as thou wilt."

But Adverſity is not the only ſeaſon for addreſſing our heavenly Father. It is at all times meet, right, and our bounden duty; and never more ſo, than when the motives to praiſe and thankſgiving are uppermoſt in our minds. The infinite mercies of God, though always matter for public thanks, muſt be then compriſed in general terms. Our Creation, Preſervation, and Redemption, imply a diffuſion of bleſſings, too great in number and kind, to be acknowledged, to the full

full ſatisfaction of a good mind, in a ſingle tranſient thought.

When we deſcend to particulars in private, we have the memory of our paſt lives, of many bleſſings, deliverances, eſcapes, and marks of divine long-ſuffering, with other obſervations we may have made upon the ways and works of God in general, to warm our hearts with Gratitude, and knit our ſouls, as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes himſelf, to our Almighty Benefactor.

Theſe are ſome of the peculiar advantages of private prayer, perfectly conſiſtent as it is with public. The reward promiſed in my text, being appropriated to the ſincerity, rather than any circumſtance of it, may be ſuppoſed to belong to devout prayer in general.

Our Lord ſaid, in a language, expreſſive either of compaſſion or contempt, that the hypocrites he ſpeaks of had their reward. Men did ſee, and were often deceived by them, which was all they aimed at.

But

But his diſciple, lifting up his ſoul to God, is not left unrewarded. He alſo is ſeen, but by a more infallible eye. His divine Maſter tells him, as having authority to ſay it, Thy Father, which ſeeth in ſecret, ſhall reward thee openly, not with the things they had in view, temporary applauſe, and other little objects; rewards from heaven are more ſolid and durable. He will be rewarded, with ſuch habits of thinking, as conſtitute inward peace; and ſuch habits of acting, as tend to the glory of God and the good of mankind.

Gifts from above are good and perfect. They are the proper ſubject of prayer; the attainment of them is the beſt motive to it; and the poſſeſſion of them is the higheſt impulſe to thankſgiving.

All theſe are reaſons for as pure an attention, as earneſt a devotion, as heavenly minded a heart and ſoul, as we can collect, to form us for prayer.

Exemplary gravity is a duty to the world, as well as to God, when we pray in public; but it need not be urged after ſincerity, which implies it. In private, the good Chriſtian will naturally be grave, and humble, and ſometimes joyful. His manner will reſult from his words; and whether it doth or not, a truly pious thought needs no external aid to convey it to the throne of grace.

If ſo few words, as "God be merciful to me a ſinner," were ſufficient to form an acceptable prayer, we need never be at a loſs, for the words will ſuit us all; and if we familiarize to our minds the thoughts, from which they proceeded—God, and his mercy, and our ſinful condition—that ſhort prayer, coming out of the abundance of the heart, will be accepted, and give us comfort in our laſt moments, when the world can give us none.

SERMON XI.

ROM. XX. 2.

BE NOT CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD.

THE vices and follies of mankind have been complained of in all ages, by heathen moraliſts and poets, by Jewiſh prophets, and Chriſtian Apoſtles and teachers. Some have concluded from hence, that men are ſo much alike in all ages, that it is in vain to attempt a reformation, by urging rules of morality or precepts of religion.

But the concluſion ſuppoſes theſe complaints to have been always the ſame. Whereas it is well known, that they have varied according to the vices in vogue; and that the obſervations, made upon one nation or period of time, are not juſtly ap-

plicable to all times and countries. Hiſtory and experience contradict ſuch exaggerations of virtuous zeal, and they diſcredit reflections upon mankind in general, which are ſometimes the reſult of a ſour, or gloomy, or diſappointed mind, rather than of that ſtrict attention to truth, with which all cenſure ſhould be delivered.

It is a known fact, that Chriſtianity has much improved the morals of the world, and it has evidently the power of carrying that improvement farther.

An ingenious advocate for it, ſome years ago ventured to diſpute the fact, by reviving an opinion, that Valour, Friendſhip, and Public Spirit, being mere creations of ſocial life, were beneath the Divine Precepts of a Religion, which came from God, with pretenſions to ſuperior authority, and more ſublime effects.

Whatever may be ſaid of active VALOUR, or conſtitutional courage, it is undeniable, that

that paſſive valour, being the inſtrument or the parent of Chriſtian fortitude, ſubmiſſion, and reſignation, is eminently a Chriſtian virtue, and animated that noble army of martyrs, which adorned the Church ſoon after its infancy, and of courſe improved the morals of the world.

With reſpect to FRIENDSHIP, the forementioned writer's obſervation was ingenious, but it wanted the recommendation of being juſt and true. In the fifteenth chapter of St. John's Goſpel, and the 13th, 14th, and 15th verſes, we find our bleſſed Saviour delivering a very high encomium on Friendſhip, in an addreſs to his Diſciples: "Greater love hath no man than this, that "a man lay down his life for his FRIENDS. "Ye are my FRIENDS, if ye do whatſoever "I command you; henceforth I call you "not ſervants, for the ſervant knoweth not "what his Lord doth; but I have called "you FRIENDS, for all things that I have

" heard of my Father I have made known " unto you." After this remarkable condeſcenſion of the Saviour of the world, to his Diſciples—whom, not content with calling his FRIENDS, he dignifies with the title of his CONFIDENTIAL FRIENDS—we cannot acquieſce, in ſtating Friendſhip as a fictitious virtue.

As to PUBLIC SPIRIT, it is ſo connected with general Benevolence, that we cannot well ſeparate them, nor can a Chriſtian be abſolutely a ſtranger to that feeling, after obſerving his Redeemer in tears, at the foreſight of Jeruſalem, the city of David, and metropolis of the Jewiſh church, verging towards its final deſtruction.

It is to be obſerved, moreover, that when St. Paul hints at vices not fit to be named among Chriſtians, he muſt have experienced the virtues connected with Chriſtianity, to have been at work in diveſting the oppoſite vices of their hold upon the human heart and mind;

mind; and as our Lord did not deliver his precepts precifely by methodical rules of art, he may well be fuppofed to have implied more than he thought it neceffary to expreſs.

My text is, therefore, to be underſtood with ſome limitation. The Apoſtle lived in countries, where Chriſtians were a very ſmall party, and he wrote the Epiſtle to the Romans to a very inconſiderable body of Chriſtians, in the largeſt and moſt populous city of the world, inhabited by heathens.

What ſort of a world was it, to which he adviſed them not to be conformed? It was a world, in which pure religion was unknown, and in which, according to the beſt accounts we have, every ſpecies of vice was in a moſt flouriſhing ſtate. So that the precept ſeems to be in ſome meaſure local, and to concern us no farther, than as we obſerve the general practice to be inconſiſtent with our profeſſion.

But a general practice, evidently bad, cannot impoſe upon a ſerious Chriſtian. He knows at firſt ſight what part he has to act, and need not be cautioned againſt the example of men, who blindly follow the impulſe of their nature, or whoſe neceſſities, real or imaginary, tempt their unprincipled minds to commit iniquity. He has too much at ſtake, to heſitate a moment in ſuch caſes.

The precept then before us is reduced to the point, to which it may be moſt properly directed—thoſe prevailing practical errors, which being of a ſpecious inſinuating nature, and maintained by perſons of reputation, are particularly enſnaring to a Chriſtian. I ſhall beg leave to mention a few of them, as objects of the caution in my text.

The firſt that occurs, is, that *a life of mere Pleaſure, diſtinct from vice, is an innocent life.* It is an error the more miſchievous, becauſe it ſeems to admit the general obligations

obligations of religion and virtue. The only ſenſe, in which it can be maintained is this, that the perſon, who leads ſuch a life, is the ſufferer, or, as the common phraſe is, that he is no one's enemy but his own. Now this, when meant as an apology, ſuppoſes him to ſtand clear of all duty to himſelf; to be not accountable to God for the uſe of ſuch talents as he has, nor to do juſtice to the world, if he only paſſes through it, without doing it wilful hurt. All this being ſuppoſed, it is no wonder, that men ſhould plead their innocence, whilſt they are miſapplying their parts, and waſting their time and fortune.

But the whole foundation of ſuch a plea is overturned, if we conſider what is undoubtedly true, that no man has a right to do what he will with his own; that all he has, is a truſt in his hands from the ſupreme proprietor of all, to whom he is anſwerable for the application of it; and that, whether ſociety owes its origin to God or to man, it

ſuppoſes

ſuppoſes every member to contribute ſomething to the good of the whole.

And what can be contributed by ſo uſeleſs a member, as one who has no other end in view, than his own amuſement?

His ſituation, his fortune, his abilities, imply duties, which he is bound to diſcharge, as a common debt; and how can he diſcharge them, if his mind be wholly occupied by ſomething intirely foreign to them? All his duties leave time for amuſement, but amuſement ſuppoſes previous labour or thought. It is in its original deſign no more, than reſt from ſerious uſeful action.

So far, a life of mere pleaſure is not innocent with reſpect to the world. It is leſs ſo with reſpect to God, as we derive our talents from him, and he muſt be ſuppoſed to require from us the right uſe of them, if we had not been expreſsly told in the Goſpel, that he will require it.

Our faculty of thinking has not ſo im-

portant

portant an object, as the discovery of our duty; and of the means of doing it. Self-preservation demands but little thought; and that, as well as pleasure, is rather the result of instinct, than of the exercise of man's rational powers, But the duty of man, the grounds of it in the goodness and power of his Maker, the rewards of it here and hereafter, the comparison of it with his past life, and the application of it to his future conduct, are matter for much meditation and recollection. They require many lucid intervals. Pleasure being of a thoughtless nature, an uninterrupted course of it is a species of insanity. The sober voice of reason and religion has no chance to be heard, without a temporary discontinuance of even innocent pleasure.

It is, therefore, on all accounts a dangerous mistake, that a life of mere pleasure is innocent. A Christian cannot think it innocent, because it excludes serious thoughts upon

upon the end of his coming into the world, and tends to extinguiſh his ſenſe of the dependent ſtate he is in, as a creature of God, and a member of ſociety.

The next error I ſhall mention, is full as prevalent and dangerous—that *the Appearance of Happineſs is more deſirable, than the real poſſeſſion of it.* It is too abſurd to be avowedly maintained; but unleſs we ſuppoſe a great part of the world to act without a principle, we muſt ſuppoſe them to act upon this. We ſee every thing ſacrificed to appearances of happineſs, and ſeldom a thought, hardly ever a converſation, beſtowed upon the means of becoming truly happy.

Now, what is it that makes the appearance of happineſs deſirable? It is, ſomething without us, obtained with great difficulty, of ſhort, uncertain duration, and of no ſolid benefit; it is, the opinion raiſed in the minds of other men, that we are happy.

If ever theſe pretenders to happineſs were

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to commune with their own heart, in their chamber, and be ſtill, the appearances they aſſume would for the time be laid aſide; they could not impoſe upon themſelves; they would ſee their caſe as it is, and know, that the world is deceived. Is this an object truly deſirable by a ſerious and ingenuous mind? and is it worth purchaſing, at the expence of more time and attention, than would be requiſite to make us happy for life?

What is it, on the other hand, that makes the real poſſeſſion of happineſs deſirable? The ſenſe we have of it ourſelves, the knowledge we have of its ſtability, the independence of it upon any opinion but our own, the tranquillity of mind it implies, and the virtuous and religious principles it ſuppoſes.

If we add to all this, that real happineſs is attainable by every man, and that the purſuit of it is free from all competition, jealouſy and envy, it will appear ſtrange, that the employment of ſo many Chriſtians ſhould be,

be, to graſp at the ſhadow of a moſt valuluable ſubſtance, ſo evidently within their reach.

The next error, to which no Chriſtian can conform, without giving up his religion, is this—that *a ſenſe of Honour is a higher and more cogent principle of action, than a ſenſe of duty.*

A ſenſe of Honour, if it means a ſenſe of what is right, and worthy of man, in the relation he bears to God and the world, is the ſame thing as a ſenſe of duty; and ſo far there is no competition between them. But the world has divided them, and in applying a ſenſe of honour to the particular caſe of reſentment of affronts or injuries, and placing the whole of reputation in this, has erected a different principle of action from a ſenſe of duty.

The opinion is ſo prevalent, that it is hardly reputable to treat it as an error; elſe it might be aſked, what right the paſſion of anger

anger has to be more unreſtrained than any other paſſion? what the uſe is of human ſociety, if every member may redreſs his wrongs himſelf, and, without an appeal to public juſtice, take away the life of another, which none but God and the civil power has a right to take away, except in the caſe of ſelf-defence.

Indeed, the practice is ſo inconſiſtent with both the ſpirit and the letter of the Goſpel, that it cannot be otherwiſe accounted for in a Chriſtian country, than from an antiquated prejudice derived from thoſe northern nations, who overran Europe, and whom we call barbarous, for their want of literature, whilſt we continue to imitate their vindictive ſpirit, in an age, which at the ſame time we call enlightened.

As their ſubſiſtence was by rapine, they knew of no argument but violence. For many ages after their eſtabliſhment in Europe, matters in diſpute were judicially decided

decided by combat, and perſons accuſed of crimes acquitted themſelves by bodily ſtrength.

When good ſenſe prevailed over this ridiculous, but melancholy, abſurdity, a notion of honour took place, and was directed to the defence of the diſtreſſed and oppreſſed. Here the reſtleſs violence being checked by laws, equal to the protection of ſuch perſons, the vagrant ſpirit of valour ſubſided at laſt in that, which is ſtill called honourable—the proſecution of revenge at the hazard of the life, both of the offender and the perſon offended.

As the remonſtrances of reaſon, and the power of law, have hitherto in vain oppoſed this crying evil, it is to be hoped that the benevolent, gentle, meek, patient and forbearing ſpirit of Chriſtianity, will in time deprive a practice, ſo contrary to it, of the protection of public opinion. In the mean time, it is evident to any Chriſtian, who conſults

ſults his religion, that he has no right to lay down his life but for God and his country. When he gives a looſe to anger, his greateſt enemy is in his own boſom; and his beſt principles will direct him to aim at a victory there, where in his ſerious hours he would wiſh to have gained it.

The laſt error I ſhall inſtance is, the root of this and every other evil complained of in the Chriſtian world, and though perfectly indefenſible, prevails more or leſs among all parties of Chriſtians—that *the whole of Religion conſiſts in acts of apparent Piety*.

It is an abſurdity ſo glaring, that no one can in plain terms profeſs it. Yet, it is obſervable, that the majority quiet their conſciences by religious acts of this ſort, and forget in the reſt of their lives, that theſe are only the means, towards the further end, of a life uniformly good.

There is not a word in the New Teſtament, to authoriſe ſo groſs a miſtake. On

the contrary, we are told, if we know the will of God, to do it; to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourſelves; to watch over ourſelves as well as to pray; to purify ourſelves, in conſequence of the hope that is in us.

When the Jewiſh Prophets ſpeak of the religious obſervances, ſo ſtrictly enjoined in their law, they never place them in competition with holineſs of life. They rather mention them with ſome contempt, when the people were weak enough to imagine, that there were no other terms of acceptance with God.

It is ſtrange, that any number of Chriſtians ſhould perſuade themſelves, that religious acts and irreligious lives are ever conſiſtent. But the account of the matter is, that they are not religious in earneſt, at leaſt not more ſo than they are friendly in every caſe, in which they uſe the common expreſſions of Friendſhip. Theſe have loſt their force

force long ſince; and, indeed, men have a right to agree in fixing the meaning of phraſes in common uſe.

But addreſſes to God are of a more ſerious and ſignificant nature. They are, in all caſes, either ſincere or ſinful. When they reſt in mere words, they are more miſchievous to ourſelves, than even the omiſſion of them, becauſe they leave us with a dangerous opinion, that we have done our duty, whereas we have only done ſomething, which is preſcribed, as the means and motive to it.

It has been often ſaid, that diſputes about Religion have leſſened the quantity of it. Whether this be true or not, practical Religion is out of all diſpute. Whatever becomes of arguments upon this or that abſtruſe point, nothing is more demonſtrable in the cleareſt of all ſciences, than this—that they, who profeſs the Chriſtian Faith, are

under an inevaſible obligation, to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in this preſent world.

SERMON XII.

[*Preached in the Cathedral of Hereford, on Aſcension-day*, 1788.]

COLOSSIANS III. 2.

SET YOUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH.

THE hiſtory of our Saviour's laſt appearance to his Apoſtles, of his being taken up by a cloud out of their ſight, and of their looking ſtedfaſtly towards heaven, with the painful ſenſations, which muſt ariſe in their breaſts, upon the diſappearance of their Divine Maſter and Friend, and with thoſe anxious wiſhes, which they naturally felt, to follow him to the bleſſed ſtate to which he aſcended; the whole hiſtory, I ſay, conſidered by a religious mind, leads directly to what is here recommended by St. Paul,

SET YOUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE.

Thither the affections of his Apoſtles could not fail to be lifted up, and thither the Chriſtian inſtructed by them, and conſidering the preſent and future ſtate of his condition, will aſcend in heart and mind, upon the ſtrength of his own reflection.

It is the whole end and deſign of the Chriſtian Religion, of all that we are taught by our Lord and his Apoſtles, and by the true Chriſtian Church from its firſt appearance, that we ſhould turn our thoughts, and of courſe our affections, from the world to God; that as the affections are the ſprings of human action, we ſhould not indeed be wholly aliens to neceſſary worldly objects, to the good of our country, of our neighbour, and of ourſelves, but that we ſhould accommodate all other obligations to the purſuit of our main intereſt; to the love and reverence we owe to our Maker and Redeemer;

deemer; in ſhort, that we ſhould duly eſtimate, and frequently recollect, the ſuperior value of eternal life and happineſs.

Affections are not ſtrictly ſubjects of a precept. They muſt ariſe from the merit of the object; and when we are adviſed or directed to prefer one thing before another, it only amounts to this, that we ſhould fairly conſider the merits of both.

Is there then reaſon ſufficient to make the attention we pay to the objects about us, conſiſtent with the attention due to things above? This queſtion affects our whole conduct, character, and hopes. No good Chriſtian makes a queſtion of it in theory; but there ſeems ſome doubt remaining; the conviction appears to be imperfect, elſe they, who are clear in the ſuperior value of what we are taught to expect in a better ſtate, to what we enjoy or purſue in the preſent, would not act, as if they had deliberately decided in favour of the latter.

It might admit of ſome apology, if they only preferred the duties of ſocial or ſelfiſh life to higher obligations, as it would argue ſome conſideration of duty. But the unneceſſary and the forbidden purſuits of life, are in like manner preferred to our firſt and greateſt intereſt. This is ſuch a ſtrange perverſion of the reaſon God hath given us, that no new or far-fetched argument will be requiſite to explode it.

We know no more of another life, than has been known, ſince it was firſt promiſed; and the comparative value of things in this world is juſt the ſame, as it has been ſince the two things were firſt placed in competition. All, therefore, that can be ſaid, is only a repetition of obvious truths, well underſtood, but little regarded; truths, which had their due weight among the beſt of the early Chriſtians, and ſtill have it upon here and there a ſincere profeſſor of Chriſtianity.

We may venture to affirm, that many more

more would ſet their affections on things above, if they would meditate upon them. But this is ſeldom done, and even then the meditation is apt to be ſhort, feeble, tranſient; it paſſeth away even more ſwiftly, than the tranſitory things upon which we ſet our hearts and minds.

The joys of Heaven are at a diſtance. Eye hath not ſeen, and ear hath not heard them. It requires ſome thought to ſet them before us, and we ſeldom think ſo purely. It requires a mind above the prejudices which take poſſeſſion of us early, and leave us late, if ever; which ſometimes retain their hold, even in the midſt of the moſt vigorous improvement of our rational powers. It requires right notions of happineſs.

HAPPINESS with God in a world without end, muſt be ſuppoſed ſo different from what we generally call and think Happineſs, that it is no wonder, that minds, occupied like ours, ſhould attend but little to it. That fulneſs

neſs of joy, which the preſence of the Creator of heaven and earth implies, is infinitely beyond the ideas or the views of an earthly mind. Indeed, death, the only paſſage to it, though it muſt be the lot of us all, is but ſeldom in our thoughts, as an event, conſtantly impending over us. We perſevere in our courſe, as if the world, and our ſhare of it, and our continuance in it, would never have an end.

So that it is not any defect in the evidence of our religion, or any uncertainty in thoſe promiſes, which aſſure us of eternal life, that occaſions the neglect of ſo intereſting an object. It is our own inconſideration, folly, inconſiſtency, and, in many caſes, impiety, that ſhuts out of our thoughts the matter, which has the moſt ſovereign right to poſſeſs them.

But if a future ſtate were uncertain, yet why do we ſet our affections upon the preſent, of which the End is certain?—Becauſe we

we meditate upon that, too, as little almoſt, as we do upon things above. We are too much in haſte, to conſider the real value of things before us—their duration, our own duration, or any of the circumſtances which would render us indifferent about them.

In the vigour of youth, we lay out all our faculties on the purſuit of happineſs. We fancy, we muſt have it. The world ſeems to offer it, and if it be not offered, we value no dangers or difficulties in the purſuit of it. The advice of old age appears ridiculous, when it attemps to check our career. The immediate effects of vice or folly are not regarded, whilſt vice or folly are conſidered as the means of happineſs. We deſire not only to be what we call happy, but we make it conſiſt in being happier than other men, and are miſerable, if that fails.

At laſt, when vanity has had all its gratifications, or has engroſſed the whole mind in ſtruggling for them, we naturally look out

for

for comforts from the wiſdom we had often derided, when informed by our aged well-wiſhers. Theſe having told us, that what we had fought for all along was a ſhadow, are now ſeconded by melancholy experience, in adviſing us to turn to ſomething more ſubſtantial, and are barely in time to convince us, that prudence and economy might be a better ſupply for our wants.

But theſe are habits to be acquired with difficulty; and the happineſs, to which they are propoſed to lead us, is a REFORMATION, a new life not to be entered into, till after many acts of penitence, and perſeverance in ſelf-denial, quite adverſe to the whole of our former life and converſation. We ſometimes hear of ſuch penitents. But they are too few in number, to leave the world the better for any change, obſervable in their AFFECTIONS, before they depart from it.

In the courſe of this perverſe digreſſion from the path in which we are taught to walk,

walk, men confirm their error, by extending the meaning of words, in order to widen the latitude, which truth and true religion prescribe to worldly pleasure and ease. The innocence of some, under certain restrictions, is pleaded for the enjoyment of them without any. The pleasure, which may have a right to fill an hour, or a day, assumes the same privilege for great part of a life. The cares, which it is prudence, or common duty, to bestow upon the world, are by an injudicious convert, in his exchange of one extreme for another, made a pretence for so eager a desire of worldly good, as is absurd in a *mortal* being, placed in a *perishable* state. Indeed, this strange affection to things on earth, often predominates in the characters even of persons, in other respects well disposed, and persuaded, that Eternity is much longer than threescore years and ten; and that the joys of this world are short

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at beſt, and often ſinful in their circumſtances, and bitter in their conſequences.

We know, beſides, more of the joys of Heaven negatively, than we imagine we do, before we conſider them. We know that they are pure, unmixed with pollutions of fleſh and blood. They are the perfection of that ſtate of mind, in which we exult with innocent or lawful joy; and they are not diſcontinued or interrupted, as even the pureſt joys, we can feel in the preſent ſtate, muſt ſometimes be. They are to laſt for ever.

The Royal Pſalmiſt deſcribes them moſt affectingly. "They, who have put their truſt "under the ſhadow of the Almighty's wing, "ſhall be ſatisfied with the plenteouſneſs of "his houſe; he will give them drink of his "pleaſures, as out of the river; for with "him is the well of life, and in his ſight we "ſhall ſee light; at his right hand are plea-

"ſures

"ſures for evermore." Theſe and ſome other paſſages, in that and other books of the Old Teſtament, will bear no fair interpretation of joys, inferior to thoſe which, in the New Teſtament, are promiſed to true Chriſtians.

Who would not wiſh, in preference to any thing the world promiſes, to ſee God; to know him; to approach to the ſupreme Lord of Heaven and Earth, the fountain of true happineſs; to feel for ever the ſatisfaction ariſing from the firſt ſight and enjoyment of the higheſt good; to be eternally removed from all that has ever diſturbed the beſt mind for a moment; to ſee no temptation, to feel no appetite to ſin; to labour under none of the wants, real or imaginary, which diſtreſs men of all conditions in ſome part of their lives?

Who would not wiſh, if wiſhing could obtain it, to ſee an inexhauſtible fund of the moſt deſirable comforts within his reach, abundant

abundant for all who are admitted to it, therefore enjoyed without envy; inacceſſible by bad minds, therefore not expoſed to the acrimony of malice?

Who would not wiſh, to taſte and ſee, how good and joyful a thing it is, to give the praiſes due to our God; to be talking or meditating, without interruptions internal or external, on his worſhip, his glory, his praiſe and wondrous works, from day to day, to all eternity?

What is there in this world, that deſerves a moment's unneceſſary thought or deſire, in compariſon with thoſe things above?

Is it the tranſport of mind in the enjoyment of pleaſure? Let thoſe, who have ſet their hearts upon it, confeſs the truth, and their deſcription will fall infinitely below the moſt imperfect view, we can take, of the joys of heaven.

Or, is it the gratification of pride and vanity? Are vain and proud men happy? We know,

know, it is the buſineſs of their lives to appear ſo; but let them ſpeak their minds, or let us obſerve them narrowly, and we ſhall diſcover, that the little contemptible happineſs they feel, is from its own nature the cauſe of ſuch diſquiet of mind, to themſelves and others, that it will not even bear a compariſon with ſome of the tranſient, little amuſements of life.

Or, again, is it the ſelf-applauſe extracted from wealth, that pretends to rival the joys of Heaven? This is the pooreſt of all pretenſions to happineſs. It is happineſs without life or ſpirit; it depends upon every thing without, and nothing within us. A mere caſualty—a robber, a falſe witneſs, or a general calamity—may convert it into miſery; and in the mean time it is, in ſome caſes, a voluntary ſuffering of the inconveniencies or even hardſhips of poverty, with a view to the uncertain, or rather improbable enjoyments of affluence.

Upon this fair compariſon of Heaven and Earth, the diſtance of one and preſence of the other, will not perplex a reaſonable mind in diſcerning the difference. The ſolid good of man will not ſuffer the fallacious objects before our eyes, to blind them. Our buſineſs in the world is to learn the difference, that we may ſecure our real intereſt, and follow our Divine Maſter, who returned to Heaven, when he had accompliſhed the work, for which he dwelt among us.

Indeed, we have more to learn than he had, when he aſcended thither. Looking ſtedfaſtly towards Heaven, will alienate us from all that is dangerous, and reconcile us to what is painful in the world. Sinful objects will ceaſe to tempt us; misfortunes will not break our hearts. A mind earneſtly intent upon Heaven, will not be diſappointed or mortified in the manner of other men. Thinking of Heaven, will qualify us for it. It will really place us above the world;

world; a ſituation of eminence, where proud men vainly pretend to be. Then we ſhall know, how to enjoy this world properly, when we have learned to make it inſtrumental to our hopes of the next. God of his infinite mercy direct our hearts to their moſt intereſting object!

SERMON XIII.

MATTHEW VI. 33.

SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE Goſpel is declared by our Saviour himſelf to have been preached to the Poor. The Grace of God, which brought Salvation through Him, was firſt addreſſed to perſons who had but little to divert their attention from it, and were numerous enough to propagate the doctrines they had heard, and atteſt the facts they had ſeen. It ſeems to have been a congregation of this ſort, to which the Sermon on the Mount was delivered; for the verſes preceding my text, contain ſome admirable leſſons againſt anxiety for the neceſſaries of life, about which they are chiefly ſolicitous. Our bleſſed Lord tells them,

them, that ſuch care is at beſt unneceſſary, for God will provide for their future, as ſurely as he has provided for their preſent ſubſiſtence. But one thing was needful, which required their utmoſt care and attention, the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs. This he enjoins them to ſeek in the firſt place; and upon doing it, he promiſes, that all inferior neceſſaries ſhall be added unto them.

Now, though the leſſon will, without controverſy, be admitted to have been wiſely adapted to them, eſpecially as it has a tendency to ſhut out of their thoughts the various means of acquiring unjuſtly more, than they can obtain lawfully, in their ſituation, yet it extends much farther, and preſſes with greater weight upon the hearts and minds of their ſuperiors in life.

If the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs are to be ſought FIRST, in preference to our future neceſſary wants, then they are above all competition with the objects, which

too many of us ſeek; and the preference here given to Religion before even cares, which are called prudential, excludes, by implication, all frivolous cares, all vain and vicious purſuits.

Among other inſtances of human perverſeneſs, perſons, who are exempted from the want of neceſſaries, and in no danger of being ever reduced to it, often create for themſelves an artificial poverty, and feel all the anxiety of the moſt indigent, for things either unneceſſary, ſuch as the objects of idle curioſity, things which may amuſe the time, as if we had nothing to do; or they are anxiouſly ſolicitous for objects, which may gratify pride, or envy, or malice, or voluptuouſneſs. And they ſeek theſe *firſt*, in preference to the natural bleſſings and laudable cares of life, and at the hazard of becoming totally thoughtleſs of religious and moral duty.

If man could be ſuppoſed to begin the world

world with an underſtanding fitted for the work, which God hath ſent him to do, and without the prejudices, which habit, education, and almoſt every thing about him, root very early and deeply in his mind, he would enter immediately upon that work; for his moſt natural enquiry would be, what is firſt to be done? The proper anſwer would at once occur to ſo pure a mind, that, in the order of things, THAT ought to take place, which it is moſt dangerous to delay; which will directly conduct all our deſires to their proper end, and limit them there; and which is moſt acceptable to the great Being, upon whom we depend for happineſs, preſent and future.

Let us avail ourſelves of ſo impartial a judgment in favour of the direction in my text; for Religion will preſent itſelf to ſuch a mind, as a work which it is moſt dangerous to delay; which will conduct all our deſires to their proper end, and limit them

there; and which is moſt acceptable to the great Being, upon whom we depend for happineſs preſent and future.

I. There is more danger in delaying it, than in putting off any other purſuit whatever. This is clear from hence, that all other purſuits terminate with this life: Religion looks infinitely farther, and is therefore moſt important, whether we expect a ſhort or a long life here.

It is moſt dangerous indeed to delay a work tending to another world, if we ſuppoſe our time SHORT in this. It would be folly to neglect any thing material, under ſuch an apprehenſion; but, as it is the great buſineſs of human life to qualify ourſelves for another ſtate, the folly of neglecting the terms of ſalvation, when our time here is probably ſhort, approaches to infanity.

Some men reconcile it to themſelves, by truſting to the goodneſs of God. It would be preſumptuous to anſwer this deciſively,

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as we know his goodneſs to be infinite; but it appears to common ſenſe a mockery of the duty of truſting in the goodneſs of God, to make it deliberately a plea for a courſe of ſin.

The other ſuppoſition of a LONG life, makes very little difference in the danger of delaying the work of religion. It preſumes in like manner, that God will finally accept us, after we have neglected him, to the very laſt ſtage of our being; that we can at once change our nature, and become, almoſt abruptly, fit for a ſtate of perfection.

How much is here taken for granted without grounds! Is there any thing in the perfections, or in the promiſes of God, upon which ſuch men can build? Will either his juſtice or his mercy authoriſe the preſumption? Before the divine juſtice, ſingly conſidered, a profeſſed ſinner has reaſon to tremble; and the mercy of God, though a moſt hopeful refuge, is offered only to thoſe who have

have done their beſt to become objects of it. As to his promiſes, his favour is no where promiſed to impenitence, or to a life, of which only the latter, and moſt infirm part, is reſerved for him. Our Saviour, in particular, the great Revealer of divine mercy, promiſes no ſalvation, without the condition of a good life, either implied or expreſſed. And what is a good life, but either the reſult of good habits early formed, or a victory over bad ones, as ſoon as poſſible after we perceive them. This requires a mind in full vigour; and to do it effectually, is not a ſudden or thoughtleſs undertaking. It is a perſevering effort, and happy the man who has time to bring it to effect.

So that the religious principle, which inclines us to fulfil the terms of ſalvation, is to be ſought firſt, in all reaſon and common ſenſe, whether we have a long or a ſhort life to come.

II. In the ſecond place, we ſhould ſeek that principle

principle FIRST, and give it full poſſeſſion of our minds, becauſe it will direct our deſires to their proper end, and limit them to that end.

Human life is, in the caſe of irreligious men, a continued courſe of miſtakes in judgment, occaſioned by the impulſe of paſſions and appetites incident to our nature. Our beſt guide, without religion, is experience. But experience ſuppoſes a conſiderable time already paſt; and though the experience of other men may, in a certain degree, ſupply the defect of our own, yet it is ſeldom ſo ſtrong a motive to action, as our own obſervations; and moſt of us have felt, how little they avail againſt the power of paſſions and deſires.

We, therefore, want a more powerful and an infallible direction; and religion, earneſtly embraced, will anſwer that purpoſe throughout life. It will conduct us in buſineſs, or in pleaſure, as far as it is ſafe to go; and

and there it will fix our bounds. We cannot ſee them without the aid of religion, for we very often do not ſee them with the aid of philoſophy. Religion is more cogent; it promiſes and threatens more, and upon more certain grounds, than philoſophy. It has the word of God to inforce its directions; philoſophy can carry on its work only by the impotent ſpeculations of men.

It is hardly reſpectful to common ſenſe to aſk, which ought firſt to be ſought after, the object of our wiſhes at random, or the guide that will direct us in the choice of the object, and moderate our deſire of it by better rules, than are apt naturally to occur to a mind engaged in a keen purſuit. The buſineſs and the pleaſures of life are both of them natural and proper, during our paſſage through it. But as paſſion will interfere in the conduct of both, what will become of us, if we begin our courſe, or proceed in it, before we have provided a better guide, than

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that blind, licentious, unthinking one, our own mere will?

It is uſual to apply theſe obſervations to youth; but, God knows, they affect every ſtage of life. Each has its paſſions, and ſuffers by their prevalency. The ſupreme power of religion over the ſoul of man, has at leaſt as much employment, in conquering the calm deliberate errors of age, as the temporary exceſſes of youth.

Our bleſſed Lord, therefore, muſt be underſtood to direct us, before we form a deſign, or execute one already formed, in ANY part of life, to ſeek firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs.

III. The third reaſon I mentioned for giving this preference to the work of religion was, becauſe it is moſt acceptable to the great Being, upon whom we depend for happineſs preſent and future.

We have abundant authority for this, both in

in the Old and New Teſtament. Moſes, David, Solomon, the Prophets, our Saviour and his Apoſtles, all lay down this as a fundamental rule for human conduct—to begin every courſe of action with the fear of God. Even the ſtudy of wiſdom is not exempted from this direction. Our firſt relation is to him, and as our whole life is meant to be an approach towards him, his light and favour are promiſed, in proportion to the progreſs we make.

We have, moreover, experience to confirm this accumulated authority. We are formed for happineſs both in mind and body; we may draw many materials for it from the natural conſtitution of the world we live in; and it is in our power to become happy, notwithſtanding the caſualties of life, by rightly exerciſing the dominion, with which we are inveſted over ourſelves. It is evident then, that our Creator deſigned us to be happy by the

the means of Religion. We feel his approbation in that courſe, and we do not feel it in any other.

For what will enormous wealth, or unbounded power, or pleaſure, do for us, upon a fair eſtimate? They will procure us a ſhort, precarious flow of ſpirits, and leave our characters either the worſe for the enjoyments they produce, or certainly not the better. Whereas a life begun, continued and ended in the fear of God, is an infallible progreſs to happineſs and perfection. It forms a ſolid, conſiſtent character, unmoved by proſperity or adverſity, by temptations or dangers, growing in grace, and advancing through all the ſtages of holineſs and virtue, till the man of God be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works.

Try this character by the opinion of the world, however the world may differ from it in practice, and that opinion will be deci-

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ſive, in favour of the religious principle. For, who ever diſliked a contented, patient, reſigned, humble, meek, and beneficent character? And who ever eſteemed the contrary? The impreſſion of both upon our minds is irreſiſtible, for God himſelf has ſtamped honour and happineſs upon the one, and diſgrace and miſery upon the other, in the eternal nature and reaſon of things.

We, therefore, do that which is moſt acceptable to him, in ſeeking FIRST his Kingdom, and his Righteouſneſs.

Why then, it might be aſked, after theſe obvious reaſons and motives, do not all profeſſors of Chriſtianity ſeek thoſe objects, in preference to any other? The anſwer would conſiſt of ſuch words, as Paſſions, Appetites, Habits, Temptations, Faſhion and Example.

But all theſe, in their united force, amount to very little, when placed againſt a ſingle ſentence, reſulting from the Piety and Experience

perience of a venerable Apoſtle, who lived long enough to hear every apology for an irreligious life; his ſummary reply to them all is,

" The world paſſeth away, and the luſts " thereof, but he that doth the will of God " abideth for ever."

SERMON XIV.

[*Preached at an Aſsize at Winchester, in the year* 1766. *George Garnier, Esq. High Sheriff.*]

PROVERBS XXIII. 23.

BUY THE TRUTH, AND SELL IT NOT.

THE acquiſition of Truth is here recommended under the idea of a purchaſe, and inflexible adherence to it, under the tenacious poſſeſſion of a property. The Truth ſo celebrated by the wiſe man, muſt be important; and he ſignifies as much, by directing the ſame precept, in this verſe, to Wiſdom, Inſtruction, and Underſtanding, which in other parts of his writings are uſed as ſynonymous words to Religion.

We may ſuppoſe, then, that the Truth he means is a great diffuſive principle or rule of life, which, if deeply rooted in the mind, will bring forth its fruits in the whole of man's conduct.

Princi-

Principles may, doubtleſs, have this effect; and the bare poſſibility of producing an uniform good life, from the vital poſſeſſion of a good principle, is ſufficient to prove the infinite value of ſuch principle. It is worth purchaſing at any rate, and the world has not an equivalent to offer for the ſurrender of it.

But it is not a matter of bare poſſibility; for reflection and experience will ſupport us in aſſerting it, as a known certainty, that men in general act upon ſome principle, good or bad, true or falſe; and that the uniformity of their good or bad conduct, is founded in the ſtrength of the principle they have imbibed.

It ſhould ſeem, as if good principles had a better chance for admiſſion into the human mind, than bad ones, ſince truth is undoubtedly better ſuited to the underſtanding, than falſehood. The aſſent we give to an undeniable truth is quite involuntary; and

we muſt be induced by ſomething foreign to our intellectual powers, ſuch as premeditated deſigns or temptations, before we aſſent to a falſehood. So far we are happily furniſhed with the grounds of right action, without labour or ſtudy on our part.

Yet it muſt be confeſſed, that the actions of men in general, in public and private life, often vary from the truths, to which our minds cannot refuſe to aſſent. We are moſt of us, for inſtance, convinced of the being and attributes of God. No man in his ſenſes can think of them with doubts; we have that important truth, without buying it, at the expence of much hard ſtudy and labour; and it is alone ſufficient, if we are not given up to a reprobate mind, to make us religious, benevolent and juſt.

What is there then, that impedes its operation upon beings, whoſe manifeſt intereſt it is, to be as good as poſſible? How comes it to paſs, that man, the moſt intelligent of all

all viſible creatures, ſo often incurs the vengeance of civil power, by committing crimes in the preſence of a Being, whoſe power he knows to be infinitely greater, than that of any magiſtrate, and whoſe government is, from eternity to eternity, adverſe to every ſort of iniquity?

The plain account of the matter is that, which is given in the pious and judicious language of our criminal proſecutions—"ſuch "men have not the FEAR OF GOD before "their eyes." They muſt believe his exiſtence, for the devils alſo BELIEVE and TREMBLE. But they have not admitted that truth into their hearts and minds, as a motive to action.

What a ſtrange inconſiſtency would this appear, if it were ſingular; to have an excellent rule of life before us; to know that it is founded in truth; to be ſenſible of its happy tendency; and to act ſo directly a-

gainſt our certain knowledge, and viſible intereſt!

This diſgraceful conduct is uſually imputed to bad education; and that may be the origin of the guilt and miſery of the loweſt criminals. But when we obſerve the like inconſiſtency in men of the beſt education, we muſt look out for ſome other cauſe, which inclines many, of the ſuperior part of mankind, to live without God in the world. The real cauſe is obvious, though ſeldom obſerved.

As Truth is the natural object of human underſtanding, and hath the power of moving us to action, when duly attended to, it is evident, that in committing evil, men do not attend duly to the true principles, which moſt men know, or, as was ſaid before, they have not the FEAR of GOD before their eyes. This inattention may be accounted for from ſomething, diſtinct from their other views

or

or temptations. It may be a bad habit of mind, prevailing in every rank of life, and beſt deſcribed by the general term of INCONSIDERATION.

Every thing abſurd or wicked in the words or actions of men, whether they blaſpheme their God, or violate the Laws of their country, or diſgrace themſelves in any other reſpect, may be traced up to this general ſource. They conſider not their Religion, nor their preſent, nor their future ſtate. They neither make uſe of their memory in looking back; nor of their apprehenſion, in diſcerning the value of the objects before them; nor of their judgment, in comparing things preſent with things to come. The faculty of Conſidering, is the diſtinction of Man from other Animals; and Inconſideration is at work to undermine that diſtinction.

It is commonly treated as an infirmity, incident only to one ſtage of life; but it is apt to take a larger ſcope among the proper

objects of Conſideration; we may find it too prevalent amidſt the gravity and ſeeming thoughtfulneſs of age. In its firſt appearance, it is hardly matter of reproach. Men are even vain of it, at the time when they ſhould begin to CONSIDER. It is interpreted as a mark of ſpirit and vivacity, to devote themſelves to the preſent moment. Some affect ſuperior powers of underſtanding in the very act of laying aſide that diſtinction, or in a habit of life, which requires a candid apology, when it is imputed to want of thought.

If the effects of Inconſideration were limited by the early part of life, a well grounded, though latent, truth might revive in the mind, and operate as a principle, when the ferment of youth ſubſides. But whilſt thoſe emotions, which are raiſed by animal ſtrength and ſpirits, are fully employed, INCONSIDERATION is forming into a habit; and the man, having deſerted his beſt guide, and weakened

weakened his beſt faculties, by diſuſe, naturally exchanges the follies of youth for thoſe of age, and takes refuge in whatever promiſes further amuſement or profit.

In common eſtimation, the man is ſuppoſed to be reformed, when he gives himſelf up to the ſober paſſions of Ambition and Avarice; and yet it ſtill appears, that he is a ſlave; for they have taken poſſeſſion of inconſiderate minds, when they put the covetous man upon heaping up riches, without knowing who ſhall gather them; and the ambitious man upon raiſing a ſtructure for fortune to demoliſh.

Such is the melancholy image which the progreſs of Inconſideration exhibits to us. It ſometimes expoſes men of ſhining parts, bleſt with every opportunity of knowing what is good, and of doing it, but occupied in the ignominious work of purſuing ſome unworthy end, by diſhonourable means; thoughtleſs both of the uncertain and unſatisfactory

ſatisfactory nature of the end, and of the infamy of the means: and thus a man qualified to ſerve GOD and the world, with reputation and happineſs to himſelf, may, by being only inconſiderate firſt, become by degrees an avowed Profligate; not having bought the Truth, or having ſold it, he may advance farther, to ſell his Religion, his Country, and his own Happineſs, for ſomething which, however ſplendid or alluring, is deſpicable in his own eyes, when he comes to CONSIDER, and compare the Price with the Purchaſe.

If we deſcend with theſe obſervations to inferior life, we there alſo find perſons with underſtanding ſufficient—for moſt men have ſufficient, to make them uſeful and happy—who merely, by not conſidering their condition and duty, in wandering from the direct path before them, proceed from error to vice, from vice to crimes, and finiſh their courſe in MISERY.

Some,

Some, indeed, may chance perhaps to lead as innocent, and as comfortable lives, as the beaſts of the field, and ſo would be only contemptible as men. But the caſe is not common, and the total abſence of good principle is not ſupplied by the activity of bad. Men who believe a lie, or whoſe minds are under the dominion of an evil principle, are uſually below the innocence and happineſs of many brutes. For bad principle is not inactive; nor is its operation like that of Truth, calm and gentle. Error, like a bad reaſoner, ſupplies its radical weakneſs by noiſe and vehemence; and urging on the originally inconſiderate man, either to dark undermining projects, or to open violence, ſoon renders Vice, that odious thing in ſpeculation, horrible in practice.

It follows, from tracing up the miſchiefs and guilt ſo prevalent in the world, to the ſingle habit of INCONSIDERATION, that the way to Virtue and Happineſs is no ſecret.

The

The truth lies before us, and we may have all the benefit of it, by only applying our underſtanding to the uſe for which it was deſigned, of conſidering and holding faſt the truth. Indeed, it is the only part of our conduct, in which we may be truly ſaid to act like MEN.

Man is no longer the firſt creature of the world we inhabit, than he exerciſes the underſtanding, which gives him his ſuperiority. He is, as was ſaid before, inferior to other animals, when he acts without due regard to the Truths, which concern him as a Creature of God. We have the authority of GOD himſelf, by the mouth of one of his Prophets, for affirming this. "The ox "knoweth his owner, and the aſs his maſter's "crib; but Iſrael doth not know me; my "people doth not CONSIDER;" that is, in more familiar language, my people is not ſo ſenſible.

The world agrees in calling it unmanly, to

to follow the mere impulſe of our Paſſions and Appetites. It is doubtleſs beneath us, to follow implicitly the opinions and practices of bad men, as we have moſt of us minds of our own, to profit by the good examples before us; for the manly character will adopt right principles, and give them the aſcendancy invariably.

The trial of virtue is in that critical part of life, which raiſes a ſtruggle between the man and his duty; in which ſtruggle, beſides other bad conſequences, we forfeit our reputation as men, if our underſtanding gives way: we become, as an Apoſtle deſcribes it, like a wave of the ſea, driven with the wind and toſſed; ſtrong enough to effect miſchief, but too feeble to reſiſt the force, which impels us to it. We are then only incapacitated to act like men, when we have loſt the influence of Religion over us; for under the guidance of our holy Religion,

we

we muſt retain the power of doing that which is lawful and right.

It has been done under very diſcouraging circumſtances; and the ſimplicity of the main truths, on which religious precepts are built, ſhews it to be in every man's power to become virtuous and happy. The Jewiſh Legiſlator, in ſumming up his laws, recommends nothing above any common capacity, when he ſays, "know therefore this day, "and CONSIDER in thine heart, that the "LORD, He is GOD, in heaven above, and "in the earth beneath." A ſenſe of Him, as governor and judge of the world, was the impreſſion he meant to ſtamp upon their minds, as a principle, excluſive of all iniquity, or neglect, or diſobedience, or ingratitude to their Creator and Governor. So that the whole of a religious life appeared to him to follow from this ſingle known Truth. The further revelation of the Goſpel aſſiſts

and

and encourages perſeverance in a practice ſo well founded.

The next obſervation ariſing from my text is, that as the evils of Inconſideration ſpread through every part of a life, and through our public and private characters, ſo the workings of good principle are diſcernible on every occaſion, which calls forth the religious and virtuous man to action. His juſtice and benevolence, the genuine offſpring of piety, will take a larger ſcope, as he advances forward in the world, and will move him, for the ſake of mankind as well as himſelf, to conſider the intereſt of his country, ſo far as it falls properly under his conſideration, to obey good government, and to reſiſt oppreſſion. He will be, in general, conſiſtent—reſolute, though gentle—religious, as becomes a man—public ſpirited, as becomes a member of ſociety—and virtuous in other reſpects, as becomes a creature, whoſe

whoſe happineſs depends upon God and his own Virtue.

The third concluſion from what hath been ſaid, is, that ſince the guilt and miſery of ſo many of our fellow creatures may be derived from INCONSIDERATION, a caſe which ſeems, or pretends, to be harmleſs at firſt, and operates, more or leſs, on a conſiderable part of mankind, we owe much tenderneſs and compaſſion to the unhappy perſons, who are proſecuted for crimes. The feelings of humanity, on ſuch occaſions, will not indeed juſtify us in departing from the Truth; but they ought to have ſo much weight at leaſt, as to prevent an officious or a vindictive ſpirit, in the proſecution.

In the fourth place, if Good Principles have a natural tendency ſo to reform the world, as to increaſe the quantity of virtue wherever they prevail; if in every caſe, it is felt and obſerved, that to be Good is to be Happy,

Happy, then a friend to mankind will be aſſiduous in propagating Good Principles, by Advice, by Example, and by every means which may give it acceſs to the hearts of men; and they, who thoughtleſsly Ridicule, or Undervalue a Good Principle, are in the end, what few of them mean to be, Enemies to Mankind.

In the laſt place, if it be fatal to a good character, on any occaſion, to act in neglect or defiance of the Truth, it is particularly ſo, when our Piety and Veracity are tried in bearing witneſs to it. God hath appointed no man to judge a fellow creature with reſpect to his eternal ſtate; but we may, without a breach of Chriſtian charity, ſuppoſe the Salvation of a man to be at ſtake, who delivers a teſtimony upon oath. The credit of ſuch an aſſeveration, in all civil ſocieties, ſuppoſes as much; and we can hardly conceive an offence more abominable in the ſight of God, than a Solemn Appeal to Him

for the Truth of a Falſehood. We cannot more powerfully urge the neceſſity of beſeeching our Heavenly Father, to graft inwardly in our hearts, the ſacred Truths, upon which our Happineſs, both temporal and eternal, ſo entirely depends. They have a right to poſſeſs us at all times; to be tranſmitted to a late poſterity, as more valuable than either Wealth, or Honours, or the Good Name, which has a better pretenſion than either, to follow us after death.

The great Jewiſh Lawgiver, who was divinely inſtructed in the formation of his common wealth, emphatically recommends to his people, the Wiſdom and Underſtanding which the Law and the Prophets, in ſubſequent ages, treated as the moſt ſolid foundation for Public and Private Happineſs. He delights in anticipating the bleſſings, when he propoſes them as the ſubject of converſation with their happy ſucceſſors, and of private meditation for themſelves.

" Thou

" Thou ſhalt teach them diligently unto thy
" children, and ſhalt talk of them when
" thou ſitteſt in thine houſe, and when thou
" walkeſt by the way, and when thou lieſt
" down, and when thou riſeſt up."

The world has ever ſince, with ſome interruptions indeed, but in a general courſe, which is the divine meaſure of governing mankind, experienced, that the moſt Pious and Virtuous people are the moſt Happy; and we have reaſons to wiſh and pray, that our Nation may continue to be diſtinguiſhed by theſe means of attaining to Happineſs, temporal and eternal.

SERMON XV.

[*Preached before the Governors of the Magdalen Hospital, May* 11, 1786.]

GALATIANS VI. 1.

BRETHREN, IF A MAN BE OVERTAKEN IN A FAULT, YE WHICH ARE SPIRITUAL, RESTORE SUCH AN ONE IN THE SPIRIT OF MEEKNESS, CONSIDERING THYSELF, LEST THOU BE ALSO TEMPTED.

THIS admonition was delivered by an Apoſtle of JESUS CHRIST, who came into the world to ſave Sinners. It is authoriſed by his divine example, and ſupported by its own reaſonableneſs. We are exhorted to look into ourſelves, when we ſee a Fellow-Chriſtian fall, and to aſſiſt him meekly, in his recovery from guilt and diſgrace. The perſon overtaken in a fault may be moſt ſucceſsfully reſtored, in the ſpirit of meekneſs; and his ſpiritual brother will be moved

to

to conſider himſelf, and ſo finding ſomething like the ſame caſe, in his own breaſt, will acquire a new reſource of Strength againſt Temptation.

The Apoſtle had recommended this elſewhere, in the particular caſe of a perſon, who had given offence to the Corinthian Church by a groſs immorality. He enjoins the reſtoration of that perſon, upon his profeſſion of repentance. In my text, his benevolent mind extends the precept to the whole compaſs of ſins and frailties, and doubtleſs includes ſuch, as bring a miſery upon the ſinners, too great to be borne, reducing them to ſolitude and want, after having diminiſhed their hopes of the favour of God, and expoſed them to the deſertion and contempt of mankind.

The Goſpel having opened Heaven to All that truly repent, however great or infamous their ſins may have been, our Apoſtle was manifeſtly guided by this evangelical

ſpirit, when he calls upon Chriſtians, who are themſelves without reproach, to become the inſtruments of a merciful God, in reſtoring a ſinner, in the ſpirit of meekneſs.

We have thus, in few words, the Doctrine and the Practice of our Saviour himſelf, to introduce and inforce our advice to Penitent Sinners.

That They were acceptable to God before the Goſpel Revelation, appears from many paſſages, and ſome examples, in the Old Teſtament; but his favour not being then ſo explicitly promiſed beyond the preſent life, we muſt look into the Goſpel for the full extent of the Doctrine of a Sinner's Acceptance with God. There our Lord expreſsly ſays Himſelf, that *God gave him*, and *ſent him into the world, that the world through Him might be ſaved*; that is, as He explains it, might have EVERLASTING LIFE. Faith and Repentance are the terms preſcribed to All men, Sinners not excepted, upon which Salvation

Salvation is promiſed through CHRIST JESUS, as the Mediator and Redeemer.

Repentance, which preſuppoſes Faith, is ſtated, as ſo very acceptable to God, that in three Parables, recited ſucceſſively by St. Luke, the divine Idea is repreſented by our Lord, as matter of Joy in Heaven, in the caſe of only one Sinner that repenteth. The man, who had loſt one ſheep out of an hundred; and the woman, who had loſt one piece of ſilver out of ten, anxious to recover their loſs, and happy in recovering it, are the inſtances, by which he illuſtrates the joy in Heaven, upon the repentance of one PENITENT Sinner out of ſo many millions, notwithſtanding it was ſo ſmall a proportion of their property.

The Father of an ungrateful and diſſolute Son, who went roving from home, in queſt of pleaſure and ruin, was tranſported with joy at his Return, when, having finiſhed his courſe of folly and guilt, he came to humble

himſelf before God and his offended parent, with a penitent heart. The father had another and a better ſon to comfort him; but he was ſo tranſported with joy on the preſent occaſion, that the ſon who appeared to deſerve much more, than was now done for the returning Prodigal, was deeply affected, and expreſſed himſelf mortified. But he was anſwered, moſt affectionately towards both, by his happy parent—"Son, thou art "ever with me, and all that I have is thine; "it was meet that we ſhould make merry "and be glad, for this thy brother was dead, "and is alive again, was loſt and is found."

We have here a clear and ſatisfactory view of the Doctrine, revealed in the Goſpel, of a a repenting Sinner's Acceptance with God. The ſame God, who will reward the good in a future ſtate, will in that ſtate be thus infinitely merciful to thoſe, who turn to Him, with heart and mind, notwithſtanding their having rebelled againſt him, and not obeyed his

his voice, to walk in his laws, which he had ſet before them.

Let us next conſider this Divine Teacher's Practice. The Evangeliſts report it to have been his cuſtom to ſpend part of his time with Publicans and Sinners, and even to admit them to the familiarity of eating with him, that he might the more ſucceſsfully inſinuate his important truths into their minds. When he was blamed for this by perſons, who were righteous overmuch, inſtead of diſavowing or excuſing it, he told them, it was the very purpoſe of his coming into the world, to ſave Sinners, whom he deſcribes as perſons loſt, wandering from their deſtination, and abandoned by other men, though welcome to a refuge in him. He expreſsly invites thoſe, who are incumbered with the weight of their guilt, to have recourſe to Him for Reſt; and leſt any ſhould be awed by the ſublime purity of his character, he obviates their diffidence, by adding,

adding, "for I am meek and lowly in "heart."

He was once invited to the houſe of a Phariſee, where a woman, who was or had been a Sinner, ventured to approach his Perſon, and honour him in a way, which ſhe thought moſt reſpectful, weeping at the ſame time, and humbling herſelf, with the moſt ſignificant marks of real Penitence. The diſſembling Phariſee was, as St. Luke relates, attentive to the conduct of his Divine Gueſt, being curious to ſee, whether he was Prophet enough to diſcern, who this woman was; and leſt it ſhould eſcape him, he proceeded uncharitably, to object her former conduct to her preſent ſtate of mind. Our Lord now took up her cauſe in a manner, which expoſed the vanity and hypocriſy of this genuine Phariſee, and ſpoke peace to her ſoul.

He was thus uniform, in directing his doctrine and practice to the great object, of inviting, inculcating, and encouraging Repentance

tance. So that the precept before us is abundantly authoriſed by Him, from whom we derive our Religion, and upon whom we reſt our hopes of Salvation. It breathes the Spirit of the Goſpel, in recommending the moſt ſalutary exerciſe of Chriſtian Humility and Charity.

We ſhall obſerve this more cloſely, by attending to the words of the Apoſtle's admonition. It ſuppoſes, that perſons, even of unblemiſhed characters, ſpiritual perſons, as they are here deſcribed, may want to be reminded of an obvious branch of Chriſtian duty—"that of reſtoring one, who is over-"taken in a fault, and, reſtoring him in the "Spirit of Meekneſs." The conſideration, inforcing this, is evidently addreſſed to ſuperior virtue, "conſidering thyſelf, leſt thou "alſo be tempted."

Chriſtian Religion, in its ſimple ſtate, abſtracted from the prejudices, which grow upon us in our intercourſe with the world, would

would inſpire us with pure univerſal Benevolence, Sympathy, and Affection. That ſingle Eye, which our Lord tells us gives light to the whole man, is ſo intent upon his duty, that nothing will divert him from it. No meanneſs of the object, no aggravating circumſtance of the ſins that depreſs an unhappy mind, would obſtruct the exertion of Chriſtian Benevolence, flowing from Chriſtian Simplicity.

It is written, that we are bound to relieve as many of the real wants of our fellow creatures, as we can; to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirſty, to clothe the naked, to viſit the ſick, to comfort the priſoner, and to aſſiſt the penitent ſinner in recovering the favour of God and the eſteem of mankind. All this a true diſciple of Chriſt will do, as far as poſſible. Whether it be convenient to himſelf, or not; whether it be reputable or not, he will, in the ſingleneſs of his heart, compaſſionate and relieve the wants

wants of the object. If this object be a Sinner, and an unhappy ſuffering ſinner, he may not therefore be a ſinner above all others, becauſe he ſuffereth ſuch things; and who ſhall judge the degree of his guilt? Chriſtian Simplicity will anſwer, Not the perſon, who feels it his duty to relieve him.

Thus we ſhould all reaſon, if we had only the Goſpel in our thoughts. But we experience by living in the world, that ſome ſins are, perhaps for good reaſons, more diſgraceful than others; and want is, without any good reaſon, looked upon with ſo contemptuous an eye, that it becomes an aggravation, when reſulting from an irreputable ſin.

The corrupt part of our nature not only pompts us to Evil, but is vigilant and active to prevent the little Good we do. Hence the apprehenſions, ariſing ſometimes in minds rather charitable, that they may diſcredit themſelves, by appearing to countenance certain

certain ſinners, though it be for the purpoſe of reſtoring them.

It is a WORLDLY PRUDENCE, too flattering and commodious to be reſiſted, unleſs a ſenſe of duty happens to be ſtrong enough to overpower the ſuggeſtion. But if it be, there is a worſe enemy at hand, SPIRITUAL PRIDE, which may lead well diſpoſed perſons to forget themſelves, and treat a ſinner, though penitent, with a diſtance or harſhneſs, which their own condition will not juſtify, and by which his will not be relieved.

I am unwilling to compare ſuch Chriſtians, with a certain Phariſee in the Goſpel, becauſe this ſort of ſpiritual pride may exiſt without Hypocriſy. But it is obſervable, that, when the Phariſee boaſted of the good things he had done, in his prayer in the temple, he might in thoſe inſtances ſpeak truth; and that the deſpiſed Publican, who valued himſelf upon nothing, might have no merit to alledge,

alledge, for he only confeſſed with humility, that he was a ſinner, and implored mercy; yet the Saviour and Judge of the world, who relates the Parable "unto certain, which "truſted in themſelves, that they were "righteous, and deſpiſed others;" concludes it with deciding in favour of the humble, repenting Publican.

St. Paul ſeems to have foreſeen, that ſpiritual pride would be in motion, as ſoon as Chriſtians were influenced in their religious conduct by the opinion of the world; and therefore the duty we are conſidering appears to have been laid down by him in the cleareſt, moſt inevaſible terms, as particularly incumbent upon the beſt Profeſſors of our Religion, they being beſt qualified for it. The purer they are themſelves, the leſs they have to fear from the condeſcenſion; the more they are in earneſt, the more zealouſly they will undertake and execute a work,

a work, which cannot be begun without a pious degree of benevolence, nor be accomplifhed without a patient perfeverance.

The Spirit of Meekneſs, here recommended, is not only in itſelf a ſpirit well ſuited to the perſons and the occaſion, ſince even the beſt of us are alſo liable to be tempted; but it correſponds with the Act of Reſtoring, in our Apoſtle's ſenſe of the word. He ſuppoſes the man overtaken in a fault, to be a member of the Chriſtian Church, ſeparated from it for a time by his fault. He ſeems to compare him to a diſlocated member of the human body, and the advice before us might be rendered, according to the original word, REPLACE, or REINSTATE him; and as a natural fellow-feeling will incline the hand, that performs this good office in the one caſe, to give the patient no unneceſſary pain; ſo in the other, a conſcioufneſs of being compoſed of the

ſame

ſame original materials, with the offending Sinner, will induce the ſpiritual man to bring him back to the Society of Chriſtians, in the ſpirit of MEEKNESS, without that mortifying ſeverity, which might harden him, and with that gentle attention, which even a ſtubborn offender can ſeldom reſiſt.

What hath been hitherto ſaid, leads ſo directly to the ſpecies of Charity now under conſideration, that it ſeems ſuperfluous to add much by way of application. Indeed, this Hoſpital is an excellent practical Comment upon St. Paul's advice; and the conduct of it, as the ſame appears from the annual Reports, furniſhes rather matter for Applauſe, than for further admonition.

The perſons admitted are PENITENT SINNERS, weary of a diſſolute life, ſuffering Shame, Remorſe, Want, Deſertion of every ſuccour from man, and a melancholy Deſpondency of the favour of God.

In this miſerable condition, they apply to the only Houſe of Mercy left open for them, and without any other recommendation than their Diſtreſs, are admitted, comforted, ſupported, reformed, rendered uſeful to the community, of which they had been a Nuiſance; and happy in themſelves; having exchanged their bad habits for good ones; having learnt the value of domeſtic life, of Sobriety, Induſtry, and Decency; having learnt to adore the Goodneſs of God, diſplayed in their recovery from Guilt, and from all its retinue of Diſtreſſes; to love and praiſe him in their Lives, as well as with their Lips; and to be in Charity with all the world, of which they had before ſeen only the worſe part, and of which the better part have, without any other motive than the Glory of God, and the impulſe of the nobleſt humanity and public ſpirit—that is to ſay, of Chriſtian Charity—communicated

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to them by the means of every real good in this life, and the way to eternal Happineſs in the next.

What a glorious employment of Money, Time, and Thought, thus to diminiſh the quantity of Evil, and ſo conſiderably increaſe the quantity of Good in the world! to reſcue, from the Devil and all his works, the hearts and minds of perſons, who had been led away captive, and are now become free, to ſerve their God, and promote his Cauſe, as far as their ſphere of action ſhall extend.

All this is no exaggeration of the praiſes due to the Founders, Protectors, and Supporters of this ſublime Charity. We have evidences of its merits in the annual accounts; by which it appears, that the ſums contributed, and the valuable contribution of a ſuperintending Care over the Progreſs of this arduous work, have been providentially rewarded with a very high degree of ſucceſs.

It appears, that of the Women admitted from the beginning of the inſtitution, about two thirds have been completely reformed, reſtored to the world, and ſent out into ſuch uſeful employments, as make their Reformation a Benefit to their country, as well as a Bleſſing to themſelves.

This authentic and comfortable aſſurance, that your labour has not been in vain, will attract the notice of all who have obſerved, how difficult it is, in moſt caſes, to give a new direction to the human mind, after it has been for ſome time bent upon a vicious courſe, and ſhut againſt every acceſs from good Advice or Example.

Experiments are frequently made in private life, to reclaim a diſſolute character, rendered ſo by youth and health under the influence of bad example. But the friendly office is apt to be coldly received, whilſt Vice has its nouriſhment from Health and Plenty. Religious and moral leſſons are inſipid, or perhaps

perhaps naufeous, to a mind occupied by falfe notions of pleafure and happinefs. Some men ingenuoufly confefs, that they cannot conquer evil appetites and habits, even in their own breafts, where their power fhould be abfolute; they fail in ftrength, or in perfeverance, and relapfe into folly or guilt.

But though the converfion of an habitual finner in general, before he is driven by want and other diftreffes, to commune with his own heart, and confider his ways, be fo very difficult and unpromifing a taſk; it is, God be praifed, not defperate in the cafe of thefe women.

Without pretending to a Miracle, we may be allowed to exult in a fuccefs, greater than the friends of this defign expected, or the enemies of it conceived poffible. It is accountable from the nature and conduct of this inftitution; from the immediate change of the fcene; the abfence of all opportunities and delufions of fin; the tranfition to a

peaceable, ſober, and regular diviſion of time; and, above all, the enjoyment of religious thoughts and exerciſes.

It is indeed a piece of juſtice due to the Women, who have received benefit here, to acknowledge, that they themſelves contributed to their own converſion; and whether they were brought hither by want, or impelled by a reſtleſs conſcience, it would be ungenerous to inquire.

Their very approach to this houſe argues ſome change of mind, ſome confeſſion, that the ways of Sin are neither ways of pleaſantneſs nor of Peace; and the foundation for Repentance having been laid by themſelves, in a ſincere ſorrow for their ſins, they have ſurely a fair claim to ſome ſhare in the merits of this inſtitution, as it could be of uſe only to thoſe, who voluntarily embraced the benefits of it, and aſſiſted in carrying them to effect.

May they continue to glorify God, and celebrate

celebrate the humanity of their Benefactors, by perſevering in their preſent courſe of life!

May others, who ſhall, like them, unhappily fall into Sin, by Seduction, or by that want of Principle, which too much diſtinguiſhes the lower part of the Inhabitants of large Cities, follow the good Examples of Repentance before them here; accept the invitation they have to this Houſe; and hearken to that more preſſing Call they have in the Goſpel to Holineſs and Virtue, to the Comforts of Religion in this life, and to the eternal Happineſs prepared for Penitent Sinners hereafter!

SERMON XVI.

[*Preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, February* 20, 1784.]

I COR. I. 21.

AFTER THAT IN THE WISDOM OF GOD THE WORLD BY WISDOM KNEW NOT GOD, IT PLEASED GOD BY THE FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING TO SAVE THEM THAT BELIEVE.

THE Churches, or Societies of Chriſtians, branching out from the firſt Church at Jeruſalem, were formed by unity of ſpirit, in confeſſing the principal truths of Chriſtian Religion. An Apoſtle or Miſſionary of JESUS CHRIST himſelf, or of that original Church, went about preaching to Jews, or Heathens, the end and deſign of the death and reſurrection of Chriſt.

The doctrines involved in this, could not be all unfolded immediately, nor could the precepts,

precepts, deducible from it, be ſtated in any other, than a ſummary way. The Convert was qualified for baptiſm, who profeſſed to quit either Idolatry or Judaiſm, by acknowledging JESUS of Nazareth to be the Saviour of the world. He was not at once, in the inſtant of his converſion, thoroughly furniſhed with all knowledge, or unto all good works.

That this is a true deſcription of thoſe infant Churches, appears from the Epiſtle before us to the Corinthian Chriſtians.

They were, in ſome ſenſe, an enlightened people, having had a long commercial intercourſe with other nations, which muſt have had the effect upon many of them, of opening their minds for the reception of the Goſpel; and the Apoſtle ſeems ſenſible of having made an impreſſion upon them, when he thanks God for the Grace, which they had received.

But they appear not to have advanced far beyond

beyond the elements of Chriſtian knowledge and practice; for we read, that they were "yet carnal, unable to bear all the ſpiritual "inſtruction they needed;" that they continued to keep "immoral company;" to be "litigious, impure, not ſufficiently averſe "to appearances of Idolatry; and that they "came together not for the better, but for "the worſe."

The Apoſtle moreover intimates, that they were "ignorant of ſpiritual gifts;" and charges them with "neglecting edification," and conducting "divine worſhip in a diſor-"derly way." Some of them even appear to have doubted concerning the Reſurrection of the dead, without which, he tells them, "the whole of their Faith was vain." He ſeems, on theſe ſeveral accounts, to have been diſappointed in them, not having heard ſo good a report of them, as he had reaſon to expect, when he left them.

Upon this ſtate of their caſe, with reſpect

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to Religion and Morals, we may preſume, without the hazard of doing them injuſtice, that their advancement in Knowledge and Grace was retarded by former habits, or prejudices, or friends; and we may further conclude, that the work of keeping converted Chriſtians ſtedfaſt in the Faith, and inoffenſive in character, required full as much activity and zeal, as that of firſt converting them.

The queſtion, whence came it to paſs, that Truths, ſo "worthy of all acceptation," were ever ſuffered, in any degree, to quit the mind, which had received them from indiſputable authority? is obviated by our Lord himſelf, in the parable of the Sower and the Seed; and the Apoſtle, in my text, adds to that parable a further account of the matter, which had probably occurred to him, when he viſited the Corinthian Church; "The "world, by their wiſdom, knew not God in "his wiſdom."

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He might indeed obſerve the ſame on other occaſions. Some time after his firſt appearance at Jeruſalem, in the character of a Chriſtian, he retired to his native city of Tarſus, which he deſcribes as no mean city. Here it was natural for him to exert himſelf, in proclaiming God in his wiſdom; and we have no reaſon to doubt of the Apoſtle's zeal. Yet it doth not appear from any report of his, or of his hiſtorian ST. LUKE, that he gained a ſingle convert.

During his ſtay at Athens, he was permitted to preach the Word very publicly to philoſophers, and multitudes, who had leiſure and curioſity to hear him; but we read, that "ſome mocked, and others ſaid, We will "hear thee again of this matter. So Paul "departed from among them;" and the number of his converts was remarkably ſmall.

The three cities, Athens, Tarſus, and Corinth, whatever were their merits in other reſpects,

reſpects, ſeem to have been too vain and ſelf-ſufficient, to attend to religious, particularly to Chriſtian Knowledge. Vanity alone might, without the aid of enemies to Chriſtianity, ſuggeſt to their preſumptuous minds, that every truth was perfectly comprehenſible by them; and that none was worth regarding, which was not delivered in the "in-" ticing words of man's wiſdom."

Hence many among them, not diſcerning the incomprehenſibility of Chriſtian Doctrine to be one mark of its Divinity, and being diſguſted at the want of ſomething ſplendid, or elegant, or amuſing, might hearken to light reaſoners, who faſtidiouſly pronounced the preaching of a ſimple, though ſublime Truth, concerning Chriſt crucified, to be Fooliſhneſs.

The Apoſtle repeats the coarſe invective, without returning any other anſwer, than that ſtrong one implied, in aſſerting the authority, and the effect, of preaching the Goſpel;

Goſpel; "It pleaſed GOD, by the fooliſhneſs "of preaching to SAVE them that believe."

Here is an intimation of other Converts or Churches, who did believe, and were ſaved; or, as they are elſewhere deſcribed, who "confeſſed with their mouths, and believed "in their hearts unto ſalvation." Indeed, the continuance of Chriſtianity depended upon effectual Converſions. We read of a Church, who "ſearched the Scriptures daily "for inſtruction;" and, in ſeveral of the epiſtles, the Chriſtians, to whom they are directed, are warmly commended for their conſtancy. He calls them his "joy, his "crown, his glory;" and tells the Philippians, "I thank my God upon every re-"membrance of you."

We may ſuppoſe them to have been awed by a ſublimity, which they could not approach with inquiries; and that, inſtead of vainly attempting to penetrate into the Sanctuary of God, they received, with humble minds,

minds, the glorious Emanation of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs; and, happy in poſſeſſing this inexhauſtible fund of praiſe and thankſgiving, they embraced the joyful tidings of Salvation, delivered to them, with an appeal to prophecies accompliſhed, and to miracles performed, either in their preſence, or within their memory.

Among ſuch a people, a Church was ſoon and deeply rooted. The Preachers of the Goſpel were the inſtruments of leading to Salvation them that believed. Whilſt one faithful Miniſter planted, and another watered, God gave the increaſe. The increaſe is well known. Chriſtianity, having ſpread far and wide, became, in proceſs of time, the national as well as domeſtic Religion of its profeſſors.

We may gather from the different ſucceſs of St. Paul, and probably of the other Apoſtles, in different places, and among people of different characters, that in the propagation

pagation of the Goſpel by human means, much obſervation, circumſpection and foreſight are as requiſite, as much zeal, ſince even in the hands of an Apoſtle, the good work might fail of ſucceſs.

The Converts, which He and his Apoſtolical Brethren made, were either Jews, who were prepared for Chriſtianity by divine Revelations under the Old Teſtament; or Heathens, who, having been trained up to civil ſociety, were not wholly ignorant of the principles of natural Religion. Yet we ſee, that in ſome inſtances vanity, in others adverſe habits or prejudices, obſtructed the permanent efficacy of the Word, even among Converts, prepared for it by their former Religion, or by their education.

Hence St. Paul finds it neceſſary moſt earneſtly to preſs Perſeverance upon them. In the Epiſtle to the Churches of Galatia, he "marvels, that they are ſo ſoon removed "from him, that called them into the Grace "of

" of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel." He warns the COLOSSIANS very anxiouſly, " not " to let any man beguile them with enticing " words, nor ſpoil them through philoſo- " phy and vain deceit." He admoniſhes the THESSALONIANS to "ſtand faſt, and not to " be ſoon ſhaken in mind;" and in his ſecond Epiſtle to TIMOTHY, he complains of a great deſertion, for "at his firſt anſwer " (at Rome) all men forſook him."

This authentic account of the difficulties, attending the early Propagation of our Religion, which are ingenuouſly acknowledged by one of the principal Teachers of it, ſeems intereſting on the preſent occaſion, however diſſimilar his undertaking may, in ſome reſpects, be from that of our venerable Society.

A ſhort and general view of their maxims, as the ſame appear in their conduct, from the very commencement of their labours, will manifeſt their zeal for the Pro-

pagation of Chriſtianity, as well as a ſenſe and experience of difficulties in their way; and if, under that ſenſe, their zeal continued unſhaken, and their conduct deliberate and judicious, with reſpect both to the OBJECTS and MISSIONARIES, it will appear highly probable, that they had the inſtructive examples and hiſtory of primitive times in their view.

It is barely a Century ago, ſince the paſtoral care of the Church of England in NORTH AMERICA, reſted upon the fidelity of no more, than Four Miniſters. Complaints were ſent over of this diſtreſs; and our anceſtors, not having yet been ſeduced by proſperity into the vanity of Irreligion, ſeized upon ſo fair an opportunity of doing good of the moſt important kind, though far beyond the common ſphere of beneficence, and with ſome formidable appearance of difficulties. But they were prompted by Zeal and Charity—two ſtimulating motives

motives to action—and inſpired with courage to give them full ſcope.

Theſe noble principles, however, having in all ages of the Church, ſince the firſt, ſometimes miſled good Chriſtians into abortive enterprizes, happily for this evangelical ſpirit, it fell under the guidance of our Society, which appears, from the Charter, to have originally conſiſted of ſome of the wiſeſt, as well as moſt benevolent men of their time.

The Charter impowered them to become Truſtees of the contributions to the Propagation of the Goſpel in foreign parts, which was explained to ſignify, the Britiſh Plantations, Colonies and Factories beyond the Seas. As the Factories had before, and the inſular Colonies much about this time, provided themſelves with a Religious Eſtabliſhment, at their own expence, the cares of the Society were chiefly directed to the Propagation of Chriſtianity in NORTH AMERICA.

The Converſion of Savage INDIANS could not fail to be immediately in contemplation; and ſucceſſive attempts appear to have been made in different parts; but moſt of them ended in the diſcovery, how little acceſs there was in the way of common inſtruction, for a Chriſtian Truth or Precept, to the minds of a people, though not merely animal, yet in moſt reſpects very unlike the reſt of mankind.

The Miſſionaries, who ſtudied their language, and did violence to themſelves in conforming to their manners, were generally diſappointed; as many of the Church of Rome had been, notwithſtanding the ſuperior advantage they flattered themſelves with, in decorating Chriſtianity with the ſuperſtitions of that Church, and ſo recommending it to the Imaginations, rather than the Underſtandings, of their Diſciples.

If ſome of the Converts of primitive times were unſtable, how little was to be hoped, after

after this experience, from a people, not ſo intelligent, nor ſo civilized, as they! Individuals, who had been accidentally ſeparated from their tribe, or were ſingularly tractable, might be perſuaded to become Chriſtians; but, in moſt of thoſe inſtances, the firſt return to their natural way of life, eraſed the good impreſſions they had received, and ſerved only to render a general converſion deſperate.

The Society, under theſe circumſtances, wiſely determined to purſue a neceſſary and practicable Good more aſſiduouſly, than a deſirable, but apparently impracticable one; and turned their thoughts principally to the Revival and Support of Chriſtianity, in thoſe Britiſh Settlements in America, who were in danger of loſing it, by the want of external Religion.

The INDIANS, however, were not abandoned. Schools and Catechiſts were ſettled in their neighbourhood, and ſome Miſſiona-

ries ſtill continued their attention to them, in order to aſſiſt the benefit they might derive from their occaſional acquaintance with Chriſtians.

O! that this had been, in general, as ſalutary in FACT, as it appears in Theory!

But there was one illuſtrious example of a Member of this Society, who had the happy art of making a familiar intercourſe with Indians inſtrumental to the Converſion of thouſands of them. I mean the late SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON—a moſt reſpectable name, which, though it ſhould be eclipſed in America, by later pretenſions of a different ſort, will be long had in remembrance and veneration among us.

In thus directing the Miſſions chiefly to the ſpiritual wants of our countrymen, the Society ſtill found difficulties, and ample room for the exerciſe of prudence. Their credit, as public Truſtees, as well as their own zeal for the ſucceſs of their meaſures, obliged

obliged them to proceed with caution, leſt their "Good ſhould be evil ſpoken of."

This was particularly obſervable in one or two inſtances of their conduct with reſpect to MISSIONS. I mentioned before, that the public call for them was preſſing; but as it was a matter of importance, to ſecure to the Miſſionary ſuch a reception, as might give a proſpect of ſucceſs to his labours, they very wiſely projected no ſtationary Miſſion, without the requeſt or concurrence of the community, to which it was deſtined.

When competitions aroſe from different Settlements, their judgment was called forth, to decide pretenſions, advanced upon partial repreſentations, and caſes, very remote from ſtrict inquiry; which diſadvantages they ſurmounted by mature and diſintereſted conſideration.

It proved, in ſome caſes, indeed, too difficult to give a preference; and in thoſe, their faculties of another kind were tried, in mak-

ing a proviſion for all the competitors. The whole Inſtitution muſt, at ſeveral periods, have been in danger of ſinking, under the frequency and extent of theſe demands, had not the reputation of its Conductors encouraged ſuch ſupplies, by general contribution, as argued in every inſtance, a prevailing religious zeal, of the beſt kind, in this country; the higheſt good-will towards our fellow-ſubjects in America; and a national approbation of the whole deſign, and the execution of it.

But the moſt conſpicuous mark of the prudential care of the Society, has been exhibited in the choice of their MISSIONARIES. If they have not all proved equally unexceptionable, every poſſible precaution has been uſed, to admit none of evil report. The indiſpenſable Qualifications, annexed to the annual Abſtract of our Proceedings, might ſerve to evince this, had not the Miſſionaries themſelves, during the laſt ſeven or eight

eight years, by their conduct and ſufferings, borne abundant teſtimony to the attention and diſcernment of the Society.

The characters of thoſe Worthies will entitle them to a laſting memorial, in ſome future impartial hiſtory of the late events in that country. Their firm perſeverance in their duty, amidſt temptations, menaces, and, in ſome caſes, cruelties, would have diſtinguiſhed them as meritorious men in better times. In the preſent age, when perſecution has tried the conſtancy of very few Sufferers for Conſcience here, ſo MANY, in ONE cauſe, argue a larger portion of diſintereſted virtue, ſtill exiſting ſomewhere among mankind, than a ſevere obſerver of the world might have been diſpoſed to admit.

Under the miniſtry of ſuch men, Chriſtianity is evidently in a progreſſive ſtate; and the great deſign of Infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs, to bring all men into the Faith of Chriſt,

Chriſt, will be finally accompliſhed, however ſlow the progreſs, and however malignant the oppoſition, or the indifference, which it may have to encounter. The harveſt is ſtill great, in the accuſtomed courſe; and we truſt there will not be wanting labourers, or encouragement, to execute the work, which at this time demands our attention, on the ſame continent.

An infant Church is riſing, under the favour and protection of Government, in NOVA SCOTIA; and it is of a ſingular deſcription, conſiſting of honourable exiles, under the paſtoral care of fellow-ſufferers. God be praiſed, there is not a party among us, religious or civil, ſo narrow, as to cenſure the exertion of our faculties, in the ſupport of Chriſtianity, in this extraordinary colony; who, having given ſignal evidence of their public virtue, and having paſſed through the ſchool of adverſity, may be preſumed eminently

nently qualified, for receiving and inwardly digeſting the inſtruction and comforts adminiſtered by our Religion.

They are by this time, it is to be hoped, approaching towards a reſt from their troubles; and may, without a vindictive ſpirit, aim at the triumph of attracting hereafter the admiration of even their revolted neighbours, when by their induſtry, their union among themſelves, their fidelity to lawful Government, and their zeal for pure Religion, they become a moſt reſpectable and happy community.

Another fair proſpect is ſaid to be opened in CANADA, where the Proteſtants, who amounted to a fifth part of the inhabitants, are ſuppoſed to have received a large acceſſion of AMERICAN LOYALISTS. As the circumſtances and condition of the Province will give great ſcope to their induſtry, and may give riſe to various commercial ſettlements at a diſtance from each other, the

cares

cares of our Society will be beneficially extended thither, where Proteſtantiſm may be ſtrengthened in its tendency to prevail, in the manner, in which only any mode of profeſſing Chriſtianity ought to be propagated.

Thus far we are not deſtitute of objects for the Apoſtolical Deſigns of this Inſtitution. We have experienced obſtacles for ſome years paſt, which our labours were not calculated to create, or provoke. In looking back with regret at the power of doing good, of which we are diſpoſſeſſed, the comfortable reflection occurs, that we have left evidences behind us, in various parts of AMERICA, of our having ſerved God, to the beſt of our judgment, in promoting the intereſts of his Kingdom.

HIS WILL BE DONE! He knows how to bring about his great purpoſes, by ANY events, and ANY inſtruments. HE is as wonderful in the Government, as in the Creation of the World; and we diſcern marks

marks of his Wiſdom and Power, in the many revolutions of human affairs, which have affected the Chriſtian Church, from the firſt century down to the preſent. With ſo ſure a foundation of confidence in him, no good Chriſtian will murmur, or deſpair, under any diſpenſation of his.

The Word of God, were it to proceed immediately from Himſelf, would be irreſiſtable; "HIS enemies muſt be ſcattered, and "they that hate Him, muſt flee before him."

When it has been conveyed by the means of Prophets and Apoſtles, the courſe of it has been ſometimes interrupted, they being men of like paſſions with the people, to whom they were ſent. But theſe were only interruptions; they could not finally arreſt it. When ST. PAUL was in bonds, he ſeems to exult in declaring, that "the Word of "God is not bound."

We are inferior inſtruments to PROPHETS and APOSTLES, and have therefore no reaſon

ſon to marvel, if we gain proportionably leſs attention, in a world generally engaged in purſuits foreign to Religion.

But this imperfection of ours, and the condition and temper of mankind, make no alteration in the Object of our Duty. It ſtill remains incumbent upon us to perſevere, with the Glory of God and the Good of Mankind in view; and to purſue theſe objects with Chriſtian Zeal, under the guidance of ſuch a degree of prudence, as is neceſſary to give effect to all, even the beſt, human deſigns.

SERMON XVII.

PSALM CXIX. 71.

IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I HAVE BEEN IN TROUBLE, THAT I MAY LEARN THY STATUTES.

THE words convey to us an admirable image of a good mind reflecting on paſt troubles. "It is good for me "that I have been in trouble." It ſeemed intolerable at the time. Now it is over, I feel it a Bleſſing. Indeed, it is a motive to Patience in general, that our affliction muſt end, and they, who bear it properly, may reaſonably hope, that their patience will be rewarded, now or hereafter. But the motive now before us, in my preſent text, deſerves to be ſeparately conſidered. We have not only reaſon to wait patiently for better days, but we have reaſon to thank Almighty

mighty God for our Affliction itſelf. The Pſalmiſt confeſſes this twice, in the excellent Pſalm before us—"Before I was troubled," ſays he, "I went wrong, but now have I "kept thy word;" and here he repeats the ſame pious thought in different words.

It will not be neceſſary to enter into that part of his hiſtory, in which he was a man of Sorrows. You will find an account of them in his life, as it is tranſmitted to us in the two books of Samuel. As he ſpeaks of himſelf, the trouble, and his happy recovery from it, was experience of his own, and it will be found a true confeſſion of the natural effect of trouble upon a thoughtful mind. Man, as a reaſonable Being, is generally the better for it. In order to be convinced of this, let us examine our minds in the two trying ſtates, of Proſperity and Adverſity.

Firſt. How is the human heart and mind affected by Proſperity? Cheerfulneſs, Exultation, Joy, and the various modes of expreſſing

expreſſing delight, are the current language of proſperous men. Their manner is envied, even when it is only vociferous; and will miſlead, though it is evidently aſſumed. Men are willing to overlook the Evils both natural and moral, to which a pleaſing character may ſeduce us. Moſes recites them, as they occurred to him in thoſe days of innocence.

In promiſing to the people of Iſrael the good land, which they were to conquer, he deſcribes it as abounding in bleſſings from heaven, and then proceeds thus: "beware, that thou forget not the "Lord thy God, in not keeping his com- "mandments, and his judgments, and his "ſtatutes, which I command thee this day; "leſt when thou haſt eaten, and art full, "and haſt built goodly houſes, and dwelt "therein; and when thy herds and thy "flocks multiply, and thy ſilver and thy "gold is multiplied, and all that thou haſt "is multiplied, then thine heart be lifted

" up, and thou forget the Lord thy God,
" and thou ſay in thine heart, my power,
" and the might of my hand hath given me
" this wealth."

Here is a ſtriking and natural image of the workings of proſperity upon the mind it poſſeſſes. It is lifted up, it forgets God, and it relies upon itſelf. All men are not thus corrupted by it. Some are humble and moderate, and confeſs their dependence upon God their Maker. But the obſervation of Moſes was well founded, notwithſtanding exceptions. There is, and was then, ſelf-love enough prevailing, to make men high minded, even without proſperity. We ſtudy and invent reaſons to think highly of ourſelves, and to induce others to think highly of us. But none of theſe reaſons flatter us more, than good fortune, which ſwells a vain mind with imaginary powers to treat other men unkindly, or contemptuouſly, or injurioufly. They ſee not the danger of forgetting

getting GOD, whilſt the object of their truſt is ſecure. Accordingly they do forget him, and live as if He did not ſee their actions, nor hear their words. They are tempted by many opportunities of ſin, continually propoſed by power and wealth; and ſome they wantonly commit, to diſplay their power and wealth; others, becauſe they forget that there is a God; and others again, becauſe proſperity has ſo diſſipated their mental powers, that they do not recollect the nature, folly, ſin, and danger of the act, to which they are tempted. They are more tempted than other men, and leſs armed againſt temptation. They know leſs of themſelves, becauſe they are more flattered. They are too much attended; too much abroad, and too little at home, to think often of their great concern,—their Duty to God, their Dependence upon him, their Mortality, and their Future ſtate.

All theſe are in great meaſure ſtrangers to the reflecting powers of men, who are called proſperous, or affect to be thought ſo. Meditations upon their real condition are too humbling. The fears of a future life are precluded by the amuſements of the preſent; and the hope of a future life, which hope is ſo full of comfort to a penitent ſinner, a deſcription which comprehends all good men, is not often entertained in a ſtate of mind, too happy at the time, to need any comfort. So that the proſperous man, with all the envy he excites, is tempted to forget his God, his duty, himſelf, his real evident intereſt both preſent and future. His good fortune will produce theſe effects, unleſs he be well guarded againſt them, by a good heart, open to every acceſs of religion and virtue, and a cultivated underſtanding, too diſcerning to be miſled by appearances, and too firm to be drawn aſide by cuſtom, or example, or perſuaſion.

Let

Let us next conſider the natural ſtate of the mind of man in Adverſity. The mind is ſaid to be dejected or caſt down in trouble. It cannot keep itſelf erect, when the powers, by which it was ſupported, are withdrawn. The ſtrength, which it could exert in better times, becomes weakneſs at the approach of various impreſſions of fear and anxiety. Being ſhaken with ſorrow, helpleſs, and feeling for relief, it is reduced to the critical moment for advice and comfort; both of which are in danger of being uſeleſs, when the want of them is moſt preſſingly felt. Pride, levity, and ſelf-conceit, the known adverſaries to inſtruction, are then removed to a diſtance. Pride is aſhamed of it; levity is neither grave, nor thoughtful, as the whole man is ſaid to be, when his heart is vexed; and ſelf-conceit is mortified, at the obſervation, how much, at beſt, his own infirmities of mind and body reſemble thoſe of other men.

He is, therefore, in the right poſture of mind for learning the truth of his condition; for looking into himſelf; for recollecting his duty, and embracing gratefully the hopes which his divine Religion propoſes to him. Affliction has not, perhaps, immediately the effect of abating our attachment to the world, but it clears the way for this, by convincing us experimentally of one edifying truth, that worldly happineſs is not laſting. We knew it before, but overlooked it. Trouble impreſſes it; for when we begin to think, we ſhall not be far from the concluſion, that as worldly happineſs is not laſting, it is not ſo deſirable as it appeared, and it is worth our while to look out for ſome other that fadeth not away.

Affliction may not introduce Religion to the unhappy man in every inſtance, but it can and doth diſpoſe the mind to be open to it. The wantonneſs of proſperity, which was a bar to pious thoughts, vaniſhes in the day

day of diſtreſs. The friends, who ſeduced us, or kept us in captivity to their prejudices, diſappear on the ſame day. When we are humbled under the mighty hand of God, it muſt be a hardened mind indeed, that can entertain a ludicrous thought on the ſubject of religion. Thus freed from obſtructions within and without, Truths from above make their way, into ſo unprejudiced a mind, almoſt with the ſame facility, with which bad advice, or a profane jeſt, or a tempting object, were admitted before.

Affliction is juſtly ſaid to be the School of Virtue, for it teaches virtue in a regular way. It qualifies the mind to receive the leſſon; it removes the opportunities, and ſuppreſſes the inclination, to vice, and forms into habit that ſelf-denial, which is of the eſſence of virtue. It is unnatural for the mind to be intent upon a forbidden object at a time, when it is abſorbed in the ſenſe of ſuffering. Out of the abundance of the heart, the

mouth will ſpeak, and the whole man will act. He is weaned from ſinful objects, in being overwhelmed with ſorrow; and if this, or the ſenſe of it, continue long enough, it may be rooted out, before the tempting object can reſume its place. From whence cometh my help? is the natural queſtion of diſtreſs; and as it argues extreme weakneſs, it will direct to the moſt effectual relief, and lift up the eyes of the ſufferer to the eminence, from which he is taught to look for help.

It is good for us then, in various inſtances, to have been in trouble. We might not think ſo at the time, but let us look back, and recollect circumſtances; and if we have gained a ſingle religious obſervation by it, we ſhall confeſs the trouble to have been good for us. If we obſerve the characters of other men before and after an affliction, we may generally perceive ſome good effect; and if any be diſcernible, it may probably be

be a more happy improvement, than was expected. The concluſions, from what hath been ſaid, are very obvious. However, they may be ſtated with ſome benefit to a conſiderate mind. Every diſcovery of a truth, which turns our thoughts to God, is the moſt valuable acquiſition we can make.

I. Firſt, then, it appears to be a natural conſequence of Affliction, that a thinking mind is led by it, to adore the Goodneſs of Almighty God. He has ſignified his will to us in his word. His wiſdom, power and goodneſs, are abundantly manifeſted in his works. He gives ample ſcope to our gratitude, in his many repeated mercies; but leſt all theſe ſhould fail, he befriends us, even when he afflicts us. It is a kind of revelation from heaven, which leads us to the diſcovery of a way to God. We are frequently called his Children in Scripture, and He our heavenly Father. The caſe of ſuffering is happily applied

plied to perfect the idea; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; our trouble becomes a mark of his favour, when we may ourselves convert it into a blessing.

II. This view of Affliction may help to explain, what sort of Affliction is good for us. It is only that, which comes from God. All the trouble, indeed, that befals us, may be said to come from him, or by his permission; but though we owe him thanks for it, when it is past, we are not obliged to ask it, and have no right to plunge ourselves voluntarily into it. He is the best judge of the time and the occasion, when suffering will most profit us; and it is then good for us, when we receive it as his will, not as the result of our own will. This strikes off much of that voluntary poverty, that extreme of humility, that gloominess of mind, which some think it a religious duty to assume. Whatever good this may do us, it seems not meritorious,

ritorious, nor equivalent to a trouble, which cometh from God.

III. We ſee the folly, and the heinous ſin, of thoſe outrages of Impatience, which drive men to the deſperate act of laying violent hands upon themſelves. Why ſhould we deſpair, if affliction be good for us? God has ſo formed us, that we may be the better for any trouble, which befals us. What a contempt of his Goodneſs, what an inſult upon his Wiſdom doth it imply, to ſet up our feeble judgment againſt our Almighty and moſt merciful Father! to quit precipitately the world, in which he hath placed us, before we have waited to ſee the reſult of our complaint! It may operate painfully; heavineſs may induce for a night, but joy cometh in the morning; or if it ſhould not come ſo ſoon as we wiſh, yet a little attention to ourſelves will convince us, that, in the mean time, it is good for us to be in trouble, if it gives us occaſion or inclination,

to

to ſtudy the will of our Maker, to learn his ſtatutes.

IV. We ſee, moreover, the ſin and folly of thoſe temporary artificial helps, by which thoughtleſs men labour to ſurmount their troubles, or, as the vulgar miſtake is, to drive away care. If any real good may be drawn from affliction, it is madneſs to ſuppreſs it wilfully by a real evil. How wicked is the attempt to bid defiance to God; to treat ſorrow, the medicine of the ſoul, as a poiſon, and have recourſe to the unnatural, ſinful joys of drunkenneſs, as the antidote! And how fooliſh is this, if we conſider, that drinking is only a momentary relief; it may endure for an evening, but the affliction will return with a vehement preſſure, when the artificial ſpirits are evaporated—when ſorrow returns with elaſtic force, after having been ſo feebly ſuppreſſed.

V. If after all, it ſhould be inſiſted on, that trouble, however good it may be for us,

is

is undoubtedly Pain and Grief to the mind; that there is always ſome difficulty in bearing it; that the beſt of us may thank God for it, when it is over, but they could not rejoice in it, when diſtreſſed; if this ſhould be inſiſted on, in an impatient moment, the anſwer is—it hath not been diſputed; it hath only been alleged upon the higheſt authority, that notwithſtanding the bitter ſeverity of trouble, it is good for us, if it prepares us for a future happineſs, to which proſperity is not ſo direct a guide.

But if, whilſt we cannot deny the truth of the obſervation conveyed by my text, we yet dread the day of adverſity, then the beſt advice is, to think of Religion and Virtue in proſperity; to render ſuch a monitor as Trouble, in great meaſure needleſs; to remember our Creator in the days of our youth; in the midſt of our abundant flow of ſpirits; and, perhaps, the evil days may not come; or if they come, we

ſhall

ſhall be better prepared to receive them, as meſſengers ultimately of glad tidings from heaven.

VI. If, in the laſt place, the BLESSING of Trouble be matter of undoubted experience, then we have the moſt powerful encouragement to truſt in God, to enter upon that happy ſtate of mind, when our worſt troubles will be pregnant with ſome good, and that of more value than the things we are apt to value moſt. We may caſt all our cares upon Him, who ſo abundantly careth for us. He provides for our wants in this world; for our hopes in the next. Our very grievances are arguments of his bounty, as they may qualify us for the eternal happineſs, to which they may finally introduce us.

SERMON XVIII.

[*Preached before the Sons of the Clergy, May* 9, 1754.]

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1 COR. IX. 11.

IF WE HAVE SOWN UNTO YOU SPIRITUAL THINGS, IS IT A GREAT THING IF WE SHALL REAP YOUR CARNAL THINGS?

THE Apoſtle throughout this chapter, as in other parts of his Epiſtles, profeſſes his diſintereſtedneſs in preaching the Goſpel. He was zealous for the ſucceſs of it, and therefore choſe freely to give up the ſupport to which he was intitled, rather than ſuffer the cauſe of truth to be reproached with the leaſt mixture of mercenary views.

It was of uſe to mention this to the churches to whom he wrote, for it obviated the ſuſpicion of any worldly deſigns in our holy religion; and though his conduct, in this reſpect,

ſpect, was not an immediate evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, yet it exhibited an undeniable proof that he himſelf was convinced.

But as other teachers of Chriſtianity might need a ſupport more than himſelf, and when the extraordinary gifts, which he had, were withdrawn from the church, the office of a teacher would require more application, and ſo become leſs conſiſtent with ſecular cares, he furniſhes his ſucceſſors with ſufficient pleas for a maintenance, in the very act of diſclaiming it for himſelf.

The pleas he urges are founded in reaſon and equity, in the law of Moſes, and the ſpecial appointment of God. Not one of theſe is more irreſiſtible than that affecting appeal to every Chriſtian's conſcience, which I have choſen for my text: "If we have ſown "unto you ſpiritual things, is it a great thing "if we ſhall reap your carnal things?"

Arguments

Arguments drawn from authority preſuppoſe both the authority, and the application of it to the caſe, to be indiſputable; and it is generally obſerved, that men who are tenacious of their property, are very ingenious in forming exceptions to any demand upon the leaſt ſhare of it.

The Apoſtle, very ſenſible of this, ſhews, that independent of all authority, he has a claim upon that familiar and natural ſource of juſtice, which is diſtinguiſhed by the name of common honeſty, and which would operate in the caſe, were the value of ſpiritual and carnal things only equal. But he, at the ſame time, intimates, that there is an inequality, and that the balance is confeſſedly in favour of ſpiritual things.

Upon this, he grounds an appeal to the higheſt principle of human action, to which our Creator intended, that both reaſon and paſſions ſhould be ſubordinate. CONSCIENCE, being clear in the value of ſpiri-

tual things, will not deny the equity of the demand; and gratitude, a more warm and lively principle of juſtice, will render us active in making the return.

If, in the judgment of any Chriſtian, the return here claimed does not amount to an equivalent, then the legal maintenance of the Miniſtry of the Goſpel ſtands juſtified, without the aid of authorities and precedents from the law of Moſes; and the Chriſtian, ſo far from murmuring at it, muſt be influenced, by his conſcience, to contribute towards the ſupply of whatever is defective in that maintenance.

The compariſon of ſpiritual and temporal bleſſings, is of great moment in every religious conſideration. We cannot lift up our hearts to God, till we raiſe them above the world; and they will not riſe higher than the world, whilſt a falſe eſtimate of carnal things poſſeſſes the mind.

Hence the Teachers of a Religion, which was

was chiefly intended to preſs mankind to "draw nigh to GOD, that he may draw "nigh to them," have, from the times of the Apoſtles, ſo much inſiſted upon the different value of ſpiritual and carnal objects, that the compariſon, by frequent repetition, may have loſt ſome of its force. But it comes with a peculiar weight, in the words of my text, where a truth, very formidable to the whole ſyſtem of human prejudices, is only applied to a mere point of equity, between the poſſeſſors of carnal, and the diſpenſers of ſpiritual things.

I need not explain the words. The ſpiritual things ſown by the Miniſters of the Goſpel, are well known to be thoſe means of grace, which they are impowered to offer, and bound in conſcience to recommend to the world; thoſe means which GOD hath appointed for obtaining his favour here and hereafter.

The favour of GOD is at leaſt as deſir-

able to him, who looks farther than this world, as the favour of his prince is to him who looks no farther. It is not the leſs ſo, for being a happineſs above our conception; for when the Scripture invites us to ſeek it by metaphors and allegories, drawn from worldly happineſs, thoſe figures which can give us only an inadequate idea of it, are explained by intimations, that the joys of heaven are perfect joys, and the pleaſures of heaven perpetual pleaſures.

The light of God's countenance is deſcribed as a ſhining light, communicating, as the ſun doth to the material world, light and warmth to the ſoul. This is the happineſs which Chriſtians aſpire after, the harveſt for which ſpiritual things are ſown.

There is hardly an inſtance in which oppoſites illuſtrate each other more ſtrongly than this. Worldly happineſs, as oppoſed to celeſtial joys, is uſually comprehended under the word proſperity—a term which con-

conveys a complex idea of the poſſeſſion of all that appetites and paſſions prompt the beſt of us to wiſh—health, wealth, and contentment.

Health is precarious by nature: wealth is expoſed to ſo many uncertainties, that it is called by the name of fortune, a capricious imaginary being; and perfect contentment, however men may preſcribe it, or boaſt of it, is hardly ever the reſult merely of health and wealth.

But though theſe are jointly requiſite to complete worldly happineſs, one of them is more aſſiduouſly purſued than the reſt, as it is obſerved, in ſome inſtances, to be the means of health, and ſeems, in general, to be a very reaſonable foundation for contentment. Beſides, the ſplendour of it, being more diffuſive, than that of a private enjoyment, or a private virtue, is more apt to dazzle the eyes of the generality of mankind.

Now, in order to extract happineſs from

wealth, it is neceſſary, not only to be judicious in the uſe, but to preſerve a conſtant ſenſibility, and a perpetual poſſeſſion of it. The firſt of theſe depends upon the character of the poſſeſſor; that the ſecond is impoſſible, we may appeal to all that proſper in the world; and that the third is ſo, it would be ſuperfluous to affirm. The happineſs, therefore, which is brought in compariſon with that which we are taught by religion to purſue, is imperfect and tranſitory.

The means to it, would of courſe be inferior to ſpiritual things, even if they did lead infallibly to that imperfect, precarious degree of happineſs, which they are ſaid to procure. But here, again, lies an appeal to thoſe who have experienced, what it is to have riches in poſſeſſion. Moſt of them will confeſs, if they ſpeak what they feel, that riches are ſo far vanity, at leaſt, that they do not anſwer the end they promiſe; they

they are not, in themſelves, ſufficient means of happineſs.

This being the ſtate then of ſpiritual and carnal things, let every man of conſcience judge, is it a great matter, if the perſons who ſow the former, deſire to reap from thoſe, for whoſe ſake they are ſown, a competent ſhare of the latter, eſpecially as their attention to the one incapacitates them from acquiring the other.

We ſee, from the different value of ſpiritual and carnal things, that the compenſation, which is far leſs than an equivalent, is a juſt and equitable claim. The legiſlators of all countries, where Chriſtianity has been received, have borne teſtimony to this truth; and though the proviſion they made for the Eſtabliſhed Clergy might, under a change of times and cuſtoms, become defective, it ſufficiently evidences their intention, to exempt the Teachers of Chriſtianity, in ſome meaſure, from the cares of

the world. So that, wherever there is a real defect, there the appeal to the conſciences of Chriſtians continues in full force.

That the maintenance of many of the Clergy of our National Church is incompetent, has been publicly proclaimed by a Royal Bounty, which was projected ſoon after the Revolution, granted in the next reign, and has been ſecured ever ſince, under two illuſtrious Protectors of our Religion and Liberties.

But it is well known, that this bounty, great as it is, has been neceſſarily ſlow in its operation, from the prodigious multitude of its objects. It can extend no farther, than a bare competency, to thoſe whoſe lot it is to enjoy it; and it cannot extend to all, who truly need it, till a very remote period of time.

In the mean while, the nature of the Miniſterial office pleads in their behalf with Chriſtians.

Chriſtians. Indeed it pleads their cauſe with All men, for All muſt obſerve their general incapacity for acquiring a ſubſiſtence, but from their office. And if, notwithſtanding the ſeveral diſcouragements poor Clergymen labour under, moſt of them are obſerved to perſevere, with cheerfulneſs and aſſiduity, in their calling, and many of them to ſtruggle with the difficulties attending a numerous family, without one public application to the charity of the Chriſtian world, ſurely it is no great thing if we are liberal, on this occaſion, to the deſcendants of perſons, whoſe poverty aroſe chiefly, from the nature of their profeſſion, from their zeal in diſcharging the duties of it, and from the inſufficiency of their legal reward.

The nature of the Miniſterial office requires, that the perſons who undertake it, ſhould be ſet apart for that office. This

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would be matter of decency, if their duty conſiſted only in obſerving the public preſcribed forms of religion. But there are many private duties, incumbent upon a conſcientious Teacher, which cannot be faithfully diſcharged, when the mind is engroſſed by other cares.

To defend the truths of religion, againſt thoſe who diſbelieve, and thoſe who corrupt them, demands more learning, and more temper, than are uſually acquired in the diſſipations of a buſy life. Yet this is a qualification which is only occaſionally requiſite. There is another more important, and almoſt a ſcience of itſelf.

To exhort, to rebuke, and to comfort, with judgment, and weight, and in due proportion, "without preferring one before ano-" ther, doing nothing by partiality," is a work of ſo much thought, experience and diſintereſtedneſs, that we can hardly conceive

ceive a mind, embarraſſed, in a great degree, with worldly cares, to be ſufficiently qualified for it.

To inculcate the virtues they teach, by their own example, requires great nicety of conduct. Other good men may keep their characters unblemiſhed by mere habits of virtue, without any extraordinrry attention to themſelves, becauſe the world is leſs curious in prying into their foibles. But a Teacher of Chriſtianity is ſo expoſed to the diſcernment of the beſt, and the obloquy of the worſt of his hearers, that he cannot, with ſafety to his character, and therefore with ſucceſs to his miniſtry, engage himſelf too deeply, in matters foreign to his profeſſion.

Thus the nature of the Miniſterial office requires, that thoſe who are dedicated to it, ſhould "meditate upon theſe things, and "give themſelves wholly to them; that they "ſhould take heed unto themſelves, and "unto their doctrine, and continue in them;"

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for it is only by doing this, that they can hope to ſave themſelves and their hearers.

Accordingly, their education is adapted to the nature of their office. It is generally obſerved, that thoſe who are moſt diligent in the courſe of their ſtudies, come into the world with a diſpoſition of mind admirably turned for the Miniſtry, but that of all men in health, they are moſt unfit to eat the bread of carefulneſs.

In the courſe of their education, the kindneſs of their friends, or the piety of founders and benefactors, had provided their ſuſtenance, with very little thought or care on their part; and the ingenious manner of converſing, which is acquired in the courſe of a liberal education, expoſes them, in many inſtances, to the crafts of little minds, who, for the ſake of filthy lucre, are tempted to avail themſelves of the ſimplicity and inexperience of their Paſtors.

Beſides this inattention to minute points of

of intereſt, they unavoidably become acquainted with conveniences, unſuitable to their future condition; and, by habit, conveniences inſenſibly change their nature, and become neceſſaries. The moſt ſtudious, who are leaſt delicate in other reſpects, may acquire a taſte for luxuries in literature, which only deſerve to be ſo called, from the proportion they bear to their ſcanty revenue.

Now, let us ſuppoſe a perſon, thus educated and qualified for his office, with a temper above the little practices of avarice or penury, with an underſtanding equal to a more lucrative profeſſion, confined to this, to which he hath ſolemnly devoted himſelf, and we ſhall admit, that nothing but religious conſiderations can reconcile him to the diſtreſs of an incompetent maintenance.

But, at the ſame time, his zeal for the ſucceſs of his Miniſtry, muſt heighten his diſtreſs. Of all the duties of Religion, Charity, expreſſed by Almſgiving, is the moſt engaging,

engaging, and that in which, for the ſake of his office, he would wiſh to be exemplary. The poor are apt to lay open their wants to the perſon, whom they apprehend beſt diſpoſed to relieve them, and whoſe ſpiritual relation to his flock juſtly intitles them to his compaſſion. In ſuch a caſe, he is frequently reduced to a ſelf-denial, extremely mortifying in itſelf, but imbittered by this circumſtance, that many ſuch arguments of his poverty will be miſtaken for arguments of uncharitableneſs.

Theſe are his diſtreſſes, even in a ſtate of celibacy; and they furniſh the Church of Rome with a pretence for impoſing that ſtate, contrary to the deſign of nature, without the leaſt authority from Scripture, and, therefore, without any power, inherent in the Church, to enact ſuch a law.

The moral conſequences of it were too groſs to have been ever intended, in the darkeſt and moſt corrupt ages of the Church; nor need

need we impute them to the projectors and ſupporters of that law. Another miſchievous effect, expoſes the deſign of it more glaringly. The uſurpations of the Papacy were greatly promoted, by this total detachment of the Clergy from civil ſociety.

Accordingly, this was one of the firſt objects, that engaged the attention of the Reformers. They immediately reſtored the Clergy to the common right of human nature, and ſo united their intereſts with thoſe of the ſociety, of which they are members.

But, though the Reformation would have been very imperfect, without abrogating that unnatural law, the bulk of the Clergy were left ill qualified for enjoying the ſocial bleſſings, to which they were reſtored; a grievance the more ſenſibly felt by them, as new obligations were introduced, by the very rights they recovered. They were now expected to become examples to their flock, in the moſt important of all human relations,

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the political, the conjugal, and the parental character.

But if the difficulties, with which an indigent Clergyman is embarraſſed, were barely tolerable, in a ſtate of celibacy, how ſhall he become exemplary in diſcharging the more expenſive duties of domeſtic life? For the change of his condition is but ſeldom attended with a proportionable change in his circumſtances.

Self-denial was ſo much his duty, and, by neceſſity, become ſo habitual to him, during his celibacy, that his own wants were leſs preſſing, in proportion as his mind was formed for inattention to them. But he has now communicated a part of his ſorrows to one, whom he would wiſh to ſee the partaker only of joys and comforts. Many conveniences, which he denied to himſelf, he cannot withhold from her. Perhaps, from a little human infirmity, he may wiſh her to appear in a manner, more conſiſtent with his character,

racter, than with his revenue. Perhaps the world may expect more of this kind from him, than even his tenderneſs for her, ſtraitened as it is by his circumſtances, could incline to.

In the midſt of all this concern for her decent ſupport, conſider how bitterly the proſpect of his own death muſt affect him! "The remembrance of death is bitter to "the man who liveth at reſt in his poſſeſ-"ſions." It is grievous to him to quit a world, "in which he has but little to vex him, and "proſperity in all things." The oppoſite condition ſhould ſeem to render death deſirable. And ſo it would, were not the diſtreſſes he labours under, tranſmitted, with great aggravation, to one, for whom he is more ſolicitous, than for himſelf. After all his ſtruggles with the difficulties attending a narrow ſupport, he is to leave her deſtitute of Any, and has only the ſmall comfort of hoping, that ſhe may be recommended to

ſome ſhare, in a charity, diſtinct from that now before us, eſtabliſhed merely for the relief of the unhappy Widows of poor Clergymen.

But the ſcene, which this painful ſeparation exhibits to our minds, becomes much more affecting, if we conſider them ſurrounded with a numerous offspring, and diſtracted by anxious cares for their education and future ſubſiſtence.

The natural tenderneſs of a parent, is known to operate too ſtrongly in the education of his child. It degenerates into an infirmity, of which a benevolent mind would rather compaſſionate the effect, than cenſure the cauſe.

But here is a parent, who was rendered unhappy by every laudable emotion of tenderneſs for his child. His parochial and domeſtic cares limited his temporal views; and his regard to his duty, confined, perhaps, very great talents, to his own profeſſion. He

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was forming many pleaſing ſchemes for educating his children, in order to raiſe them above the wants, by which himſelf was depreſſed, but was called, prematurely, from the enjoyment of thoſe wiſhes, and interrupted, in the hopes of happineſs of a ſuperior kind for himſelf, by the apprehenſion of miſery to his family.

He muſt have had too much experience of the world, to flatter himſelf, that his orphans would be treated with the partiality, of which they were ſecure in his breaſt. It would have been ſome conſolation, as he muſt deſpair of much indulgence to them, to be aſſured, that the charity, which they are reduced to ſeek, will be obtained, and prudently applied. But as it is conſidered as mere charity, it was to him but a precarious dependence, whilſt he ſaw the religion, which inſpires it, not duly attended to.

Theſe are very melancholy reflections in his laſt hours; and though his mind ſhould

be principally elſewhere engaged, yet it is rather to be wiſhed, than always experienced, that religious conſiderations may have the greateſt weight, at a time, when human nature is moſt diſtreſſed.

Permit me, therefore, to put the benefactions of this day upon a plea leſs evaſible, than that of mere charity, by repeating the Apoſtle's queſtion—" If we have ſown unto " you ſpiritual things, is it a great thing, " if we ſhall reap your carnal things?"

He ſtates the queſtion, as if the People, to whom he wrote, thought it an unreaſonable claim. It cannot be conſidered as ſuch, in the caſe before us, unleſs ſome other proviſion could be ſuggeſted, to prevent the deſtitute ſituation of theſe children.

We are told, indeed, of levelling ſchemes, abſurd in ſpeculation, and to all appearance impracticable; not to mention, that if they could take place, they would prove inſufficient for the end.

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In the ſight of God, all orders and degrees of men are equal, except only the diſtinction of their religious and moral characters. But as men cannot perfectly diſtinguiſh theſe, the courſe of the world muſt depend upon other conſiderations. And as the caſe of accumulating riches, from the ſuperior offices in the Church, is too rare, to found a general complaint, ſo there are very few inſtances, in compariſon, of perſons poſſeſſed of thoſe offices, who have been inattentive to the wants of their inferior brethren, and have, by their own conduct, weakened the force of this appeal to the conſciences of mankind in general.

I ſay, of mankind in general; for the Fathers of theſe Orphans were employed in an office of the higheſt utility to the public, as preachers of righteouſneſs, which exalteth a nation. The ſpiritual things, which they have ſown, amidſt all the corruptions of the world, have contributed to preſerve peace,

and order, and juſtice amongſt men. So far their children, impoveriſhed by the profeſſion of their parent, deſerve the attention of every man of public ſpirit.

But let Chriſtians as ſuch, conſider the uſe of the Miniſterial office to Themſelves; how much they ſtand in need of the admonitions, and the comforts, they receive from it, in order to their perſeverance in the duties, and their attainment of the hopes of their Religion. The CHRISTIAN, who conſiders this, cannot want motives, either of charity or juſtice, to contribute to the preſent Collection; nor can he be earneſtly intent upon the proſpects Chriſtianity opens to him, if he ſuffer thoſe motives to be overpowered, by the narrow fear of alienating any part of his property.

It is not alienated from the public, for every virtuous Child, provided for upon the plan of this Charity, is an acceſſion of wealth to the community; and the ſucceſſors of their

their parents will be animated to bear the diſcouragements of their office, by the comfortable hopes they derive from this ſolemnity, that when themſelves are provided in another ſtate, their children will not be left totally deſtitute in this.

Nor do the Contributions of this day, alienate the property of the contributor from himſelf; at leaſt no more, than the purchaſe of any other inſtance of happineſs.

That "the merciful man doth good to his "own ſoul," is a truth founded in experience, as well as authority. None but a very malignant mind can be inſenſible of the pleaſure of doing juſtice, or of communicating happineſs.

The glory of God conſiſts chiefly in this; the life and character of our Saviour, Himſelf and his doctrine, had no other tendency; and an Apoſtle, who throughout his Epiſtle, carefully diſtinguiſhes real Religion from nominal, having placed much of the purity

of Religion in viſiting the Fatherleſs and Widows in their Affliction, does by implication plead powerfully, in behalf of theſe Fatherleſs and Widows in particular, as they ſtand more intimately related to Chriſtians, as they derive their poverty from the Eſtabliſhment, and found their hopes of relief, in the ſpirit of Chriſtianity.

TWO

CHARGES,

DELIVERED BY

THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD

TO THE

CLERGY OF HIS DIOCESE.

A CHARGE

TO

THE CLERGY

OF

THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD,

DELIVERED AT

THE BISHOP'S PRIMARY VISITATION,

IN JUNE 1789.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

AS the principal deſign of theſe Viſitations can be but imperfectly anſwered, till I am better acquainted with the ſtate of the Dioceſe, from the Returns you will be pleaſed to make to my Inquiries, I muſt endeavour to be uſeful, on the preſent occaſion, upon general ſubjects, ſuch as are applicable to a Solemnity like this, without the aid of local Obſervations.

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Having naturally no great proſpect of meeting you again thus aſſembled, I could wiſh to comprehend within this hour the whole of Miniſterial Duty. I could wiſh to exhauſt that treaſure of Paſtoral Advice, contained in the Epiſtles of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus. But as our time would not admit ſo large an undertaking, and it might only have the appearance of preſſing upon you obſervations, which muſt naturally occur to any attentive reader of thoſe Epiſtles, I ſhall confine myſelf to the moſt conſpicuous parts of our Public Duties, and truſt, that what I ſhall offer will not be unacceptable to an aſſembly of worthy Clergymen.

I muſt ſuppoſe myſelf addreſſing ſuch, unleſs the contrary were notorious, and ſhall therefore paſs over general Exhortations to a Life and Character becoming Miniſters of the Goſpel. They are ſo perpetually obvi-

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ous to a ſerious mind, engaged in a courſe of Miniſterial Studies and Duty, that it would appear unneceſſary at beſt, without ſome very loud call, to lay the Precepts of Religion and Morality before You, whoſe Profeſſion it is to impreſs them upon other men. It would even appear injurious to a body of Miniſters of the Goſpel, of any Denomination, to ſuppoſe them ſo groſsly inconſiſtent, ſo loſt to all ſenſe of Decency, Reputation and Duty, as to be remarkable for counteracting their own Preaching.

The public Offices of reading Prayers and adminiſtering Sacraments, Preaching and Catechiſing, are preſcribed to us with clear directions by the Rubric, which may be conſidered as part of the Law of the land, and which we are all engaged by a ſolemn Subſcription to obſerve. But thoſe directions are not ſo minute, as to extend to the MANNER of performing the Duties. THAT is, in great meaſure, left to the judgment of our under-

underſtandings, or to the advice of judicious friends, or to the diſpoſition of our own hearts.

We are directed, for inſtance, to read the Prayers diſtinctly, and with an audible voice; a very material direction, ſo far as it goes. We doubtleſs read to little or no purpoſe, unleſs we are heard; and they who read naturally, as all judicious men do, or read attentively, as all good men do, need no farther direction, than to be loud and diſtinct. Here the Rubric ſtops.

Perhaps Affectation and Levity were not ſo prevailing two or three Centuries ago, as to inſinuate themſelves into the moſt ſerious employment of the human mind. But we, of the preſent age, have at times had occaſion to obſerve, that Affectation may miſlead a well-meaning Reader to overact the Prayers, and to be needleſsly emphatical, which is the more abſurd, when the Emphaſis is miſtaken; to aſſume a vehement or pathe-

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tic manner, of uſe perhaps on other public occaſions, but of no efficacy towards obtaining the end of Prayer, or ſupporting a ſpirit of true Piety in a Congregation.

Our Forms of Prayer are ſuperior to pretended Aids or Embelliſhments of this ſort, being ſuited to a grave, humble, compoſed manner; and the good ſenſe of the nation would, if the practice were general, be diſguſted by an appearance of Vanity mixed with Devotion. When a declamatory mode of praying was moſt in vogue, among the Enthuſiaſts of the laſt Century, their Prayers were adapted to it; and what was the Effect? Many who might have been better diſpoſed, under better direction, were driven to avoid the deteſted imputation of Hypocriſy, by running into the other Extreme of avowed Impiety.

But ſtill this extravagance, unpleaſing and ſuſpicious as it is, may be the overflowing of

of a warm heart, very ſincere, though very injudicious. There is another offence againſt propriety in Public Worſhip, which may grow into Habit through levity, or want of attention to the work we are engaged in: I mean, a thoughtleſs, haſty, irreverent delivery of Prayers to Almighty God, neither expreſſive of Piety in the Reader, nor fit to excite it in the Hearer; miſchievous to a ſad degree, when it offends good minds in the congregation; more ſo, when it creates Indifference in the reſt.

Theſe two Extremes, into which a well-diſpoſed Reader may inadvertently be led, are ſo very unedifying at beſt, that the mention of them is ſufficient to diſſuade from the imitation of them; and I introduced them chiefly for the purpoſe of leading your thoughts to the comfortable reflection, how much the Miniſters of the eſtabliſhed Church have it in their power to raiſe, confirm, and propagate

propagate a ſpirit of Piety in the nation, by the proper diſcharge of only this one part of their duty.

We are of equal conſequence in Preaching; and there too the moſt natural manner is generally the moſt ſucceſsful. Divine Truths have a power of their own, and will make an impreſſion, though unſupported by the Arts of Eloquence. If the Preacher, in delivering the Meditations of his own mind upon them, is too ſerious to be ſuſpected of Indifference; too plain and intelligible to be charged with Vanity; and too natural to be conſidered as pleading a Cauſe, of which he is not fully convinced himſelf; he will generally penetrate into the Hearts of his hearers; and, whether he ſends them away with admiration of him or not, he may anſwer a higher end, in diſmiſſing them thoughtful about themſelves and their condition in the ſight of God.

Indeed, in ſpite of all that has been done to diſcredit Religion, there is an attention ſtill paid to Preaching, ſufficient to demand and encourage our diligence in that part of duty. It is manifeſtly unworthy of a perſon ſet apart for the ſtudy of the Scriptures, and the inſtruction of mankind from them, to reſt wholly upon the labours of other men, and, for a little preſent eaſe, to give up the improvement himſelf would receive from offering advice of his own. The people naturally expect to hear ſomething original from their Miniſter; and thoſe abſenters from Church, who plead that they can read a good ſermon at home, have a better, though not a full Apology, if their Preacher has no inſtruction of his own to give them.

A Miniſter of the Goſpel, who has a due ſenſe of his Office, will be always prepared with ſound Doctrine and well-conſidered Advice. Every natural and moral Event in the

the world, will adminiſter to the buſineſs of his Calling, in providing him with Paſture for his Flock. The different ſeaſons of the year; the many ſtriking inſtances of a general, or interpoſitions of a particular Providence; uncommon caſes of Mortality, of Affliction, of Proſperity, ſupply him with abundant materials for various and uſeful Diſcourſes. He has, if he is diſpoſed to walk in it, a ſpacious field for the exerciſe of his Soul in religious thoughts. The Sins and Follies ſurrounding him in the world, whilſt they are incitements to a laudable zeal, ſpare him the trouble of much obſervation, in offering perpetual matter for Exhortation and Admonition.

But, above all, the great Doctrines relating to our Salvation, which muſt be ſuppoſed familiar to him, cannot be inculcated too often. The diſcuſſion of them, in a controverſial way, rather becomes the Preſs than the Pulpit, where Chriſtian Truths ſhould

be taken for granted, and the conſequences flowing from them be chiefly inſiſted on. Few Congregations hear the practical inferences from a religious doctrine with Languor; whereas moſt congregations grow weary and indifferent, when led into elaborate proofs of what they believe and underſtand, as well as it can be underſtood, when ſimply propoſed.

This leads me to a ſubject, which merits all the ſtreſs that can be laid upon it. We are appointed Public Teachers, and never anſwer that deſtination more to the ſatisfaction of the world, as well as of our Conſciences, than when we inſtruct the moſt Ignorant. If their ignorance be innocent, it is a pleaſant work to remove it; and, if the knowledge we can give them be more beneficial than any other, we may, without vanity, aſſert the honour of being appointed to an Office of very high importance. Now this claim of ours is never ſo indiſputable,

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as when we are active in the duty of Catechiſing Children.

I am authoriſed to recommend, moſt earneſtly, the frequent practice of it. If my authority were only Rubrical, it would deſerve regard from all who have ſubſcribed to the Liturgy. Were the practice only Cuſtom, the generality of it in all Chriſtian Churches would ground a preſumption of its expediency. But our Church hath not left it to any leſs obligation, than that of a poſitive Law. In the fifty-ninth Canon we find it preſcribed under penalties, which I ſhall not recite, apprehending the bare preſcriptive part ſufficient to anſwer a good end in this Dioceſe.

The direction of the Canon is—"*Every* "*Parſon, Vicar or Curate, upon every Sunday* "*and Holiday, before Evening Prayer, ſhall,* "*for half an hour or more, examine and in-* "*ſtruct the youth and ignorant part of his* "*pariſh, in the Ten Commandments, the Ar-*

" *ticles of the Belief, and the Lord's Prayer,*
" *and ſhall diligently inſtruct and teach them*
" *in the Catechiſm ſet forth in the Book of*
" *Common Prayer.*"

Here is a very circumſtantial direction for performing this duty, every Sunday and Holiday,—before Evening Prayer,—during the ſpace of half an hour.

I am not authoriſed to ſuggeſt Excuſes for any neglect of this Canon, and rather wiſh, that the full obſervation of it were more practicable and general; yet, in order to obtain a more frequent practice of it than is obſervable, it may be worth conſidering, what weight or plauſibility there is in any plea, that can be alleged for a departure from the rigour of this law.

The Clergy, thoſe I mean, who ſerve more than one Church, may plead partly the want of time, and partly the fatigue of a full employment of the day. The Congregation may be impatient during the ſeverities of Winter.

Winter. The Miniſter may think, that the attention will be cloſer, and the impreſſion ſtronger, in a leſs frequent performance of the duty, as words are apt to loſe much of their force by conſtant repetition. They may farther allege, that the principles and practice of our Religion were ill underſtood before the Reformation, and that it required a Century perhaps of conſtant inſtruction, of this ſort, to give the people intire poſſeſſion of this valuable knowledge; but that we, who live after ſo much has been done, may ſafely ſomewhat relax our aſſiduity, with reſpect to the Elements of Religion, and turn our thoughts more to the ſtronger nouriſhment, which it likewiſe is our duty to provide for Adults, and others further advanced in life.

Theſe are the beſt Excuſes. Let us next conſider the general Practice. I fear, we ſhall find it, in too many caſes, out of the reach of theſe excuſes.

It may be divided into three Claſſes. The firſt conſiſts of thoſe pariſhes, where the Children are catechiſed during the ſummer months, perhaps near half the year; the ſecond of thoſe, in which this uſeful work is confined to the ſix Sundays in Lent; and the third of thoſe, in which it is not attended to at all.

Now, though the firſt of theſe falls ſhort of the Canon by one half of its direction, yet it muſt be confeſſed, that there is weight in the plea, of the Miniſter's being under the neceſſity of ſerving more than one Church, and of the unwillingneſs of a congregation to be detained longer than the common Service in the winter, as well as in the expediency of leaving an interval, which may bring the children back to the inſtruction with ſome improvement of their capacity, and give the Miniſter more time for that, which he has to provide for their Parents. They, therefore, who go ſo far towards

towards the obedience due to the Canon, as to catechiſe one half of the year, deſerve commendation and thanks from their Pariſhioners, rather than their cenſure.

They who confine this part of their duty to the Sundays in Lent, may mean to keep up a regard to the Seaſon dedicated by our Church to a recollection of our religious Obligations. The motive is doubtleſs ſerious, but it will not ſatisfy the Queſtions, whether the ſeaſon of Lent be ſufficient for the purpoſe? Whether the Children are ſo very deſirous and ſuſceptible of this knowledge, as to apprehend and retain it, after a mere formal anniverſary repetition of ſix days, or rather of ſix half hours? Whether ſo ſmall a ſpace of time, as is hardly ſufficient for the acquiſition of any uſeful knowledge whatever, will ſuffice to root Chriſtian Faith and and Practice deeply enough in the mind of a Child, to arm him againſt the temptations

of

of the World, the Fleſh and the Devil, which will certainly beſet him? And what proſpect a Miniſter of the Goſpel, intruſted by God and Man with the care of tranſmitting Chriſtian Faith and Practice to a ſucceeding generation within his ſphere, can form to himſelf, that his Truſt will deſcend intire through the hands of perſons ſo little inſtructed?

Parents are ſometimes negligent in preparing and ſending their children, and ſome may not condeſcend to exhibit them along with their inferior Fellow Chriſtians. This is a diſcouragement much to be lamented, but it is not a general grievance; and if only the children of the Poor were to attend, they are committed to the care of the Miniſter equally with the reſt, and, in a public view, their numbers compenſate for the conſequence they miſs of by their birth, conſidering how much of general Comfort and

Safety

Safety depends upon their good principles. So that the beſt motives, religious and civil, for propagating Chriſtianity, apply as properly to that as to any part of life.

Some worthy Clergymen are ſo ſenſible of this, as even to exceed the half hour preſcribed by the Canon, in reading an Expoſition, either printed or prepared by themſelves They are doubtleſs laudably employed either way: But poſſibly, an unpremeditated explanation, ariſing from the manner, in which the anſwers are repeated, may have more effect and be better remembered. It may beſides prove a happy opportunity of making a laſting impreſſion, by lifting up the minds of the Children, in other parts, from the ſound to the meaning of the words.

If the younger part of our Brethren ſhould acquire by this means a facility of ſpeaking profeſſionally, it would be a valuable acquiſition to their Miniſtry throughout life. The bad

bad uſe made of religious language in former times, ſhould not totally diſcountenance it. But this fatal extreme has been obſerved in other Proteſtant Countries, and occaſioned ſome years ago the erection of a Society, in a foreign Univerſity under the dominion of our Sovereign, for the purpoſe of exerciſing Candidates for the Miniſtry in the language proper for the exigencies of their Office, either in admoniſhing or comforting, inciting or diſſuading, inſtilling good or eradicating bad principles; and the Society was eſtabliſhed by a Royal Charter, the preamble to which founds it in the importance and neceſſity of the Miniſterial Office to the well-being of mankind. I mention it merely to ſhew, that the expediency of habituating ourſelves to profeſſional language, out of the preſcribed Forms of our duty, is not a new obſervation, and that an unpremeditated inſtruction of our own, intermixed with the queſtions of the Catechiſm, if it be only a ſentence or two

occaſion-

occaſionally, might ſupply the want of ſo very uſeful an inſtitution among us.

I am at a loſs what to ſay of the Miniſters of thoſe Pariſhes, where the people are ſtrangers to any Catechetical inſtruction. The moſt candid account to be ſuggeſted is, the Non-reſidence of the Miniſters; an evil, ariſing chiefly from the known inſufficiency of their Maintenance. Before the Reformation, great part of this evil aroſe from the intereſt the Court of Rome had in diſpenſing with Reſidence. When that power was aboliſhed in this country, the happy change was attended with the new evil of alienating much of their original proviſion from the Parochial Clergy, which had been miſapplied; and thus it became neceſſary, in this reformed Church, to continue Pluralities and Non-Reſidence.

I am not diſpoſed to complain of any *legal* Indulgence or Exemption, but muſt lament, that they have produced inſtances of Non-Reſi-

Reſidence, which are neither *legally* nor *reaſonably* ſupported, and may in time become matter of public animadverſion, the impropriety of it being obvious, and the miſchiefs ariſing from it, in ſome caſes, great and manifold; the Church, the Houſe of Reſidence, the Religion of the Pariſhioners, and the income of the Succeſſor, being all grievouſly affected. It would be wiſdom in thoſe, whom this obſervation concerns, and much to their credit, to obviate new regulations, by removing the cauſe of the complaint.

A reſident Curate ſeems to remove it; but that can only avail the Incumbent, who reſides upon another Benefice, or is elſewhere laudably or Clerically employed. When a Spiritual Income is converted into a mere Eſtate, a conſiderable part of the work, to which it is appropriated, muſt be withdrawn, however worthily a Curate may ſupply the abſence of his Principal; and if

thoſe

thoſe Incumbents, who are not exempted from Reſidence, ſhould avowedly conſider a Reſident Curate as a full diſpenſation from it, they will in time occaſion a prevailing opinion, that the ſpiritual benefit, received by the Pariſhioners, is worth no more, than ſuch Miniſters pay to their Curates.

But ſome of this ſort of Non-Reſidents have not even that excuſe to plead; and if a Pariſh be deſtitute both of its proper Paſtor and his Curate, it exhibits to us an image of the effects of a deſolating Perſecution, and will fill a ſerious mind with gloomy Proſpects, till he compares the caſe with that of more happy Pariſhes, whoſe Miniſters reſide, and, conſidering their relation to their flocks, keep up a conſtant intercourſe, both friendly and religious, with them, and particularly treat their Children, in point of inſtruction, as if they were their own, whoſe future ſtate they muſt be ſuppoſed to have at heart.

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If Non-Reſidence be not the cauſe, in any inſtance, of a total omiſſion of this duty, I can aſſign no other, that will leave it in any degree excuſable. Engagements of Pleaſure cannot be pleaded, without a defiance of religious Obligations; and though buſineſs may be a more admiſſible plea, yet it muſt be very indiſpenſible, to outweigh ſo preſſing a call upon a Pariſh Prieſt, as that, to which he is obliged to attend, by the deſign of his Office, by his Ordination Vows, and by his general Duty to God and Man. Even literary purſuits, reputable and beneficial as they are, will not be alleged by a learned Incumbent, as an excuſe for neglecting the ſpiritual wants of the moſt ignorant Souls, committed to his Care.

Before we leave this ſubject, let us recapitulate it in two or three plain Propoſitions, which may ſerve to impreſs what has been offered.

It

It is one great End of the Eſtabliſhment of a National Church, to ſecure the Inſtruction of the Ignorant, that they may become innocent and uſeful upon Principles of Religion, as being ſtronger motives in the mind poſſeſſing them, than the Directions or Penalties of human Laws.

Children are the moſt ignorant part of mankind every where, and will, if quite neglected, be left to the Examples before them, which are ſeldom good; or to the direction of public Laws, with which they are not acquainted; or to the Penalties of Law, which are not powerful enough to deter a mind, trained up without the Fear of God, and a Knowledge of his Will, his Mercies and his Terrors, from becoming a Nuiſance to the Community.

The inference is obvious, that thoſe Pariſh Prieſts go fartheſt towards promoting the Ends of a Church Eſtabliſhment, who are

moſt diligent in CATECHETICAL Inſtruction.

I have offered to your conſideration, my Reverend Brethren, matters in which you are not all equally concerned. Many of you may be already habituated to the Diligence you would wiſh to ſee revived. But it is moſt probable, that they, to whom what hath been ſaid may not be perſonally of uſe, will hear it with patience for the ſake of their younger, or their leſs diligent Brethren.

It is never out of ſeaſon, at Solemnities like this, to review the buſineſs of our Calling, and it is particularly in ſeaſon at a time, when our national Church is remarkably favoured and protected by a moſt Religious and Gracious KING; and when the Legiſlature has recently diſcountenanced Deſigns, which appeared to them to affect the ſecurity of our Church Eſtabliſhment.

We may, without the leaſt ill will towards the

the Chriſtian Parties, who live in a ſtate of ſeparation from us, embrace theſe additional motives to recollect and purſue the great Ends, for which we are eſtabliſhed.

The primitive Teachers of Chriſtianity had no ſuch encouragements. They had many violent Prejudices to combat, and much cruel Oppreſſion to endure; and yet the Chriſtian Religion gained Strength, and in time Eſtabliſhment, by their unwearied perſeverance. We have no obſtacles to ſurmount in the diſcharge of our duty, but ſuch as will generally yield to a prudent zeal and a CHRISTIAN Character; and, inſtead of ſuffering as they did, we are countenanced and protected in our Perſons and Property.

If Peace and Proſperity, thoſe Corrupters of the human heart, ſhould ever ſo enervate the zeal of the Miniſters of CHRIST, as to render them indifferent to HIM and HIS Cauſe, the Church will then be truly in Danger.

Let us deprecate ſo fatal a Diſgrace, beſeeching Almighty God moſt earneſtly, in the plain and comprehenſive words of our Liturgy, that all they, who are ordained to any Holy Function, may, both in their Life and Doctrine, ſet forth the Glory of GOD, and ſet forward the Salvation of all men, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord!

A

CHARGE

TO

THE CLERGY

OF

THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD,

DELIVERED AT

THE BISHOP'S TRIENNIAL VISITATION,

IN THE YEAR 1792.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

I ACKNOWLEDGE very thankfully the Good-will, with which you have ſent me Returns to the uſual Articles of Inquiry, delivered to you at my former Viſitation; and am confident, you will receive with Candour the attention, with which I thought myſelf obliged to conſider them.

My firſt object was, to become acquainted with the ſtate of Chriſtianity among us, to

which, I need not ſay, all the reſt are ſubordinate Inquiries.

Whether our Religion, in the complex view of Faith and Practice, be in a progreſſive ſtate, ſhould be determined by the number of its Profeſſors, which might be collected by much labour and attention; but the reſult would not be deciſive, unleſs men's real Sentiments were in general manifeſted by outward Profeſſions.

An inoffenſive life is ſometimes ſaid to be a better mark to diſtinguiſh a Chriſtian, than a Profeſſion of his Faith. But as an inoffenſive character, merely as ſuch, may be the effect of natural temper, or of a high degree of human Prudence, it is well prepared indeed for the impreſſions of Chriſtian Doctrine, but cannot ſtrictly be taken into the account, when we are ſelecting true Believers of Chriſtianity.

Nor would the number of thoſe, who frequent Divine Worſhip, be admitted an infallible

fallible Evidence of Chriſtian Proſperity, how deſirable ſoever the appearance may be; as it may be objected, and cannot be abſolutely denied, that there are inſtances, in which a pure ſpirit of Religion, in individuals, ſeems to be neither the motive, nor the object, nor the conſequence, of ſuch appearance.

The only means then left, of arriving at a more ſatisfactory judgment of the number of true Chriſtians, is, to ſelect thoſe frequenters of public worſhip, who add to a ſober and virtuous life conſtant Attendance upon an Ordinance, ariſing from, and intimately connected with, the fundamental Chriſtian Doctrine. This will point out to us the Communicants, as being, in moſt caſes, true Members of the Chriſtian Church, they being moſt probably Aſpirants to Salvation through Jeſus Chriſt.

The Communicants at the great Feſtivals

will more immediately anſwer the purpoſe, as they muſt, in all Charity and Reaſon, be ſuppoſed to bring with them a ſenſe of God's infinite Goodneſs to man, celebrated by the Chriſtian Church at thoſe Seaſons.

I have, therefore, examined and compared the Anſwers returned to my noble Predeceſſor on this ſubject, at his primary Viſitation in the year 1747. As he filled the See upwards of forty years, the diſtance of time will lead to as preciſe a judgment, as can be formed, of the Increaſe or Decreaſe of ſuch ſincere Chriſtians, in our part of the national Church, from that period to the preſent. The Anſwers are not all equally accurate, either then or now, but allowing for ſome inaccuracies in a matter, which depends partly upon memory, a concluſion may be drawn from the compariſon, approaching nearly to the truth; and I wiſh it were a matter of congratulation;—but I have

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to lament, that the concluſion neither agrees with the boaſted Improvements of the age, nor with the ſuppoſed Increaſe of population.

The unhappy fact is, that the Communicants in the year 1747 appear to have been many more—ſo many more, than thoſe reported in the year 1789, that I am unwilling to recite the numbers. Yet it is obſervable, that the numbers of the year 1747 are not ſo conſiderable, as might have been expected in a flouriſhing ſtate of our Church, in which, for near a century before, every man had been encouraged to attend his Religious Duties, not only without moleſtation of any kind, but with the immediate reward of the reputation belonging to a good Chriſtian, in a Chriſtian community.

It might have been not unreaſonable, to have expected then, that one Communicant at leaſt ſhould attend from every family, profeſſing themſelves members of our Church, which was far from being the caſe. The

Decline

Decline we have to lament might have been prevented, by the Example and Perſuaſion of one good Chriſtian in every houſe. Chriſtianity grew and prevailed at firſt with a wonderful rapidity; but admitting the hand of God to have been viſible in that great event, we may venture to attribute it partly to the conſtant, though ſecret, meetings for religious Rites, for which Chriſtians at that time were celebrated by Heathen, as well as Chriſtian writers.

Now from thoſe numbers, which fell very ſhort of ſo reaſonable a wiſh, above forty years ago, we are fallen off, in ſuch proportion, that if we were to continue in the ſame declining ſtate, which God forbid! the appearance at our Sacraments would, forty years hence, be extremely deplorable.

So great a defection could not be abrupt. It muſt have been gradual, conſidering how reluctantly men depart from long uſages, eſpecially of the religious kind; and that it

was

was gradual, will appear, if we conſider ſome of the probable cauſes of it.

It may be dated from the various attacks of Revealed Religion, in the courſe of the preſent century; not from the ſolidity of the arguments againſt it; for they were effectually repelled by eminent writers; but from this unhappy conſequence, that the minds of many active men, engaged in the Paſtoral care, were diverted from their regular modes of Inſtruction, to anſwer fallacious objections, and guard againſt arts of diſputation.

If this was intended by the enemy, it was a deep deſign, worthy of the great enemy of mankind himſelf, thus to convert the zeal of faithful Miniſters of the Goſpel into an inſtrument of its projected ſubverſion. Some of us may remember public Diſcourſes, from which the People ſhould learn the Articles of their Creed and Rules of their Practice, converted in many Churches into polemic Tracts, able perhaps, but uſeleſs to all thoſe,

thoſe, to whom they were unintelligible. It was, therefore, ſo much time loſt to neceſſary Inſtruction.

A conſcientious Miniſter of the Goſpel might conſider it as a caſe within the Vow he made at his Ordination, "to baniſh and "drive away all erroneous and ſtrange doc-"trine contrary to God's word."

I would not object to the Apology, if the caſe were really within the Vow. The ſtate of our Church at the time, when the Ordination Service was compiled, will explain the extent of that Vow. The Church of Rome and the Separatiſts from our Church muſt have been the parties aimed at; but both thoſe parties acknowledging the authority of Scripture, might be tried by it, and the common talents of a vigilant Paſtor might ſecure his flock againſt them. Whereas here was an attack upon Divine Revelation itſelf. The authority of God's word, as contained in Scripture, was brought into queſtion.

queſtion. Such a controverſy was not in view at the time of preſcribing that Vow to Candidates for the Miniſtry, and could not, from its nature, be meant to be diſcuſſed by them, in public diſcourſes.

However it was experienced, that good men thought themſelves called upon to diſcuſs it within the ſphere of their own Congregations; and it is certain, at the ſame time, that the People, whom it is continually expedient to remind of their Duty, could gather little more from an anſwer to writers, whom they had not read, and perhaps could not read, than that the Principles, upon which they had been taught their duty, were diſputed.

The bare knowledge of this would in courſe of time create indifference in ſome, and encourage the profligacy of others. The Church would be leſs frequented, and this inſtituted Memorial of our bleſſed Redeemer and his Merits be neglected. The then generation

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of the Faithful might continue unſhaken; but the riſing generation would be leſs carefully prepared for the religious Proceſs from Baptiſm to Confirmation, and from thence to the Lord's Supper.

Another practice ſprung up, which had a tendency indeed to avoid Controverſy, but by ſinking revealed Truths in oblivion. The moral Precepts of the Goſpel were ſeparated from its ſublime Doctrines, and exalted above its edifying Inſtitutions. The plea was, that the end of our Religion is the Reformation of Man, in order to his Acceptance with God; and under the miſapplication of this undoubted truth, the end was deprived of the beſt means to accompliſh it, which means are offered to us, as the Gift of God for the Salvation of Man.

Whilſt the conduct of our Religion was thus miſtaken by well-meaning men, it ſuffered grievouſly by another Claſs of Miniſters, who have not ſuch opportunities of obſerving

obſerving the decay of Chriſtian Piety among their Pariſhioners, as reſidence would offer; and not obſerving, could not be ſuppoſed to guard againſt it.

Doubts might beſides ariſe in weak or ſuperſtitious minds, about their Unworthineſs to receive the Sacrament, and might become a religious motive, or furniſh a pretence, for abſenting, through the want of a Miniſter, whoſe duty it would be to refer them to a Declaration of the Church in the Communion Service, that they, who come with a true penitent heart, and lively Faith in Chriſt our Saviour, are meet Partakers of that holy Communion.

Without entering into the various reaſons, which ſome of us may plead for attending their Paſtoral Care only at the ſtated times of public Worſhip; or for not attending it at all, in perſon; or the reaſons, which others may pretend, for not leaving it to a reſident Subſtitute; I ſhall only mention, that the unhappy

happy diminution of the number of Communicants is moſt obſervable in thoſe Pariſhes, who ſee their Miniſters only at ſtated times of worſhip; or do not ſee them at all; or have not the benefit of a Subſtitute, dwelling on the ſpot, to ſupply the Inſtruction, to which they would have been entitled from their inſtituted Paſtor, if he reſided among them.

After having thus imputed ſo large a ſhare of the blame to the Miſtakes or Neglect of departed Miniſters of the Goſpel, it muſt be admitted, that the Manners of the Age have contributed much to the Evil we lament. An inundation of Wealth, and its natural concomitant Luxury, could not fail to diſcountenance a ſenſe of Religion.

It requires a gravity of mind, ſuch as that of our anceſtors, nearer the time of the Reformation, to conſider the importance of the Chriſtian Duty before us; to recollect, that Meditations on the Love of God in Chriſt Jeſus will go far towards diſplacing

thoſe

thoſe bad habits and views, which take early poſſeſſion of the human heart; and that the ſame meditations, frequently repeated, will in time direct the whole Man to the purſuit of his everlaſting Intereſt.

Inſtead of this, for many years paſt, every thing has been conſidered as dull, that correſponds not with the general levity of the minds, that conſider it; and as to Intereſt, that which is immediately preſent will commonly take place of a better, more remote Intereſt, even in this world. A life after this, having no part in their calculations, they muſt become indifferent to Religion and religious Rites. The Heart will be where its Object is; and the better Heart, which is ſet upon a more permanent Treaſure, will be derided. The ridicule will in time change the appearance of the beſt objects in unguarded minds, and ſo put the Public Profeſſion of Religion out of Countenance. Men

will grow aſhamed of Chriſt, to whom they owe ſo much; and, in their falſe ſhame, will diſregard his Offers, and forget his Promiſes, till ſober reflection brings them back to their Duty.

In thus endeavouring to account for the Deſertion of our Communions, I have not found myſelf warranted, my Reverend Brethren, to lay a general blame upon the preſent reſident Clergy of this Dioceſe. Some may perhaps fall on a few. If it doth, they cannot fail to apply it; therefore why ſhould I? eſpecially, as I wiſh to ſay nothing, that might tend to defeat, in part, the End I aim at—of your Co-operation with me in every thing, that may promote or reſtore the Service of GOD among us.

So far as your Predeceſſors miſtook in their conduct, we of the preſent age are in no danger of incurring the like miſtake. The Arguments of Unbelievers of Divine Revelation

lation being exploded, and in great meaſure forgotten, few men now living would conſider it, as parochially inſtructive to anſwer them. As to the mere moral Eſſays, which have a tendency to conceal from a Congregation the animating Evangelical Truths, and by that means diſcredit the Chriſtian Inſtitutions, you muſt have obſerved the Coldneſs and Inefficacy of that ſort of Preaching, compared with the Words of Eternal Life, tranſmitted to us by the Author and Object of our Faith.

And as to the matter of Non-reſidence, it has been ſo long complained of, that it is become a term of reproach in all caſes, in which it is not protected by Law, or juſtified by unavoidable Neceſſity. It will therefore in time ceaſe to operate powerfully as a Cauſe of the inſtance before us, of a general decay of Chriſtian Piety.

We appear then to have chiefly ſo much

of the miſchief to remove, as ariſes from the Manners of the Age we live in, in order to bring men back to their Duty, as Chriſtians; and here the proſpect is not comfortleſs. The Diſſipations, which alienate them from ſerious thoughts, rather create indifference to Religion, than determined enmity to it. So that we may hope to have it much in our power to recall thoſe, who have erred and ſtrayed from their way to Heaven.

The number of Communicants is conſiderably leſſened upon the whole, but it ſeems practicable to reclaim many of them; there being ſome Pariſhes, whoſe Miniſters have either retained, or by their Diligence recovered, the former number.

It would be a glorious proſpect, to ſee this laudable Diligence in a way to prevail univerſally; and I humbly apprehend, that ſuch a proſpect may be opened, if you ſhould all agree with me in opinion, that the preſent

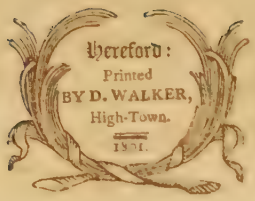
ſent ſtate is DISGRACEFUL and DANGEROUS. Every good man will labour earneſtly to ſtop the natural deſcent from Bad to Worſe, foreſeeing, that it muſt in the end render his Office uſeleſs. For what is a Chriſtian Church without a Memorial of Chriſt? or a Miniſter of the Goſpel, who has not Communicants to join with him in ſolemnizing that Memorial?

You will pardon me, my Reverend Brethren, for laying this matter very ſeriouſly before you. I ſhould rather hope, you would think me inexcuſable, if I were not alarmed, and did not ſtate my apprehenſions to you; and this ſingle conſideration encourages me to flatter myſelf, that what I have ſaid will leave ſome impreſſion.

I may not have another opportunity of thus addreſſing you; and if what I have offered to your attention, ſhould be thought worthy of it, I ſhall bleſs GOD for having made

made me, in any degree, inſtrumental in preſerving, from a negligent Diſuſe, the inſtituted Memorial of his ineſtimable Love to Mankind in Chriſt Jeſus.

THE END.



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Select sermons

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